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CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

PRESENT STATE

OF THE

CHURCH-ESTABLISHMENT,

IN LETTERS

TO

THE RIGHT REVEREND THE

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

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CONTENTS.

LETTER I.

Introduction — — Page 1

LETTER II.

On Eſtabliſhments in General, and that of the Church of England in particular - p. 7

LETTER III.

On the Tolerating Spirit of the Church of England — — — p. 33

LETTER IV.

On the Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction — p. 58

LETTER V.

On the Proviſion of the Clergy — p. 80

LETTER VI.

On the Learning of the Clergy, and the Freedom of Inquiry — p. 113

LETTER VII.

On the Public Forms, and on the Duties and Manners of the Clergy - p. 137

LETTER VIII.

Conclusion — — — p. 158

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

My Lord,

THE long ſuſpenſion of religious controverſies between the different denominations of Proteſtants in this country, the uninterrupted liberty and ſecurity with which all of them have profeſſed their reſpective opinions, and exerciſed their reſpective modes of worſhip, and the terms of amity which have for the moſt part appeared to ſubſiſt between them and the Eſtabliſhed Church, had I believe produced a general perſuaſion; that as we were all grown wiſer

about the ſubjects on which we differed formerly, ſo we were grown more reaſonable, liberal, and benevolent with reſpect to thoſe things, on which we may ſtill differ; that there was little reaſon to apprehend a revival of diſſentions and animoſities, which are always the effect of prejudice and paſſion, and on religious ſubjects are peculiarly unbecoming.

I confeſs, I am diſappointed in ſeeing even a ſingle inſtance of that ſpirit, which I had flattered myſelf had been totally extinguiſhed. That people ſhould be of one mind in matters of religion, either with reſpect to the ſubſtantial part of it, or the form in which it is to be adminiſtered, a very moderate knowledge of human nature will teach us never to expect; but that notwithſtanding theſe differences men ſhould treat each other without bitterneſs, with moderation and candor,

candor, is an expectation, which in theſe times I ſhould have thought not quite unreaſonable. I proteſt, my Lord, when I now hear of * 'our venerating 'ſurplices, gowns, caſſocks, and hoods; '† when I ſee every kind of civil and reli-'gious evil charged to the account of 'Epiſcopacy; and am told ‡, that all Hu-'man Legiſlation is oppreſſive to con-'ſcience;' I feel myſelf ready to believe, that we are ſet backward in the world three or four generations; and can with difficulty be perſuaded, that we are in truth advancing towards the end of the eighteenth century.

* Plan of Lectures on the Principles of Non-conformity, for the inſtruction of Catechumens. By R. Robinſon. Approved by the Eaſtern Aſſociation at Harlow, Eſſex, and ſigned, by order of all, by the Moderator. Lect. 5.

† Lect. 3. throughout.

‡ Lect. 9.

Intemperate Cenſure is not fitted either to convince or to conciliate reaſonable inquirers; but it has led me, as it probably may others, to reflect on the ſubject with ſome attention, and to conſider, diveſting myſelf as much as I could of a natural partiality to a Church of which I am a Member, and a Profeſſion to which I belong, how far our Eccleſiaſtical Eſtabliſhment, as it now ſubſiſts in this country, is an Inſtitution fit for the purpoſes it was meant to anſwer, both with reſpect to Religion and Society; how far the Clergy of England are worthy Miniſters of the Religion of Chriſt, and uſeful Members of our Civil Community.

The Principles, on which Eſtabliſhments in general, and our own in particular are founded; the Tolerating Spirit of the Church of England with reſpect to Chriſtians of other denominations; the

Juriſdiction

Juriſdiction aſſigned to it by the Laws of our Country; the Proviſion made for its Clergy; their Learning and Freedom of Inquiry; our Public Forms in which they officiate, their Duties, and their Manners, are particulars, which naturally offer themſelves on this ſubject. But it is a ſubject, my Lord, like all others, where human inſtitutions and numerous bodies of men are concerned, in which it is fruitleſs, it would argue only an ignorance of our nature, to expect abſolute perfection. Comparative merit is all, that the beſt governments and wiſeſt inſtitutions can claim; imperfections and defects will in all the works of man every where occur to us; time and a change of circumſtances will produce them, where they did not originally exiſt; and we muſt be ſatisfied with thoſe inſtitutions, where they are the feweſt and leaſt; we muſt be contented to eſteem thoſe excellent,

where they are mixed with what is good and valuable only in a ſmall proportion.

Permit me, my Lord, to addreſs the reflections I have been led to form on this ſubject to your Lordſhip; the eminence of your ſtation in the Church, and the eminence of your character in that ſtation, will I hope give this addreſs ſome propriety.

LETTER

LETTER II.

On Eſtabliſhments in general, and that of the Church of England in particular.

WITH ſome perſons, my Lord, the word *Eſtabliſhment* is itſelf criminal; they reprobate all Human Authority, all Human Opinions, which reſpect religion, as unlawful; as infringing their own liberty, and derogating from the Supremacy of Chriſt. I will beg leave to ſtate the principles, on which, according to my conceptions, all Religious Societies muſt be founded; and ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that all, which are deſigned for any permanency, (for a congregation in a field, which never meets again, is not worth calling a ſociety) muſt in effect admit, whatever they may

profeſs to do, Human Authority for their regulation, muſt concur in Human Opinions as a bond of union; and that Eſtabliſhments, as ſuch, are not on that account unlawful; inconſiſtent with our liberty as men, with our allegiance to Chriſt as Chriſtians.

Such authority may be ill-employed, ſuch opinions may be ill-founded, and improperly impoſed; violence may be exerted by the one, in order to enforce the other; by their abuſe they may both become pernicious; but it no more follows from thence, that the principle on which they are uſed is unlawful, than that, becauſe there are in the world many bad Civil Laws, therefore all Legiſlation is unjuſt.

If Religion were to ſubſiſt only in the hearts of individuals without the concurrence

currence of others, or any external profeſſion of it; if God had not meant, that in this inſtance, as well as in all others, we ſhould be Social Creatures, the Truths and Precepts, which we collect by our reaſon, and which are delivered to us by revelation, would then in their naked ſtate be ſufficient to make us in this manner religious: we might certainly think of God as we pleaſed, and offer to him in what manner we pleaſed our ſolitary worſhip. But if we are not ſatisfied with that, if we are prompted by our nature to unite with others in the adoration of the Supreme Being, and feel our religion imperfect without doing ſo, we muſt in ſome reſpects agree with thoſe others; there muſt be ſome mutual compliances; and certain regulations muſt be admitted, both with reſpect to the Outward Form of Worſhip, and the Opinions conveyed by it.

Without

Without ſome regulations of the Outward Form in which the Worſhippers are agreed, it is impoſſible that Public Worſhip can ſubſiſt even in its ſimpleſt ſhape; and as the reaſon of this worſhip, the manner of our addreſſing God, and the duties which we ſuppoſe him to require from us, ariſe from the Opinions we form concerning him, concerning his attributes and government, it is plain, that without a certain Agreement in theſe opinions it is impoſſible for different perſons to join in the worſhip of God, and in giving or receiving Religious Inſtruction, which uſually makes part of it. A Jew or a Chriſtian could not join with an old Heathen in worſhipping his numerous and imaginary deities. A Proteſtant cannot concur with a Papiſt in offering his prayers to the Virgin Mary, to Angels, and to Saints. The ſame prayers alſo, and the ſame inſtruction, cannot well

ſuit thoſe Proteſtants, who differ about the Object of their worſhip, or about the Neceſſity of good works to ſalvation.

Every United Set of Worſhippers muſt therefore agree in certain Forms and Opinions; and they muſt make ſuch Agreement the condition, on which others may be admitted to their Society. They muſt preſcribe, like all other ſocieties, theſe conditions for themſelves; and thoſe, who do not chuſe to comply with them, muſt either not enter into ſuch a ſociety, or retire from it.

'But this, it is ſaid, is an infringement of our Liberty, an oppreſſion of Conſcience; it is uſurping the Supremacy of Chriſt; and giving Human Opinions that authority, which is only due to Divine Revelation.'

That

That Abſolute Liberty is inconſiſtent with every ſpecies of ſociety, whether civil or religious, is moſt certain; it can only belong to detached, inſulated individuals. The moment we begin to act in concert with any of our fellow-creatures, this liberty is narrowed; we muſt ſubmit to ſome rules, and be content to lie under certain reſtraints with reſpect to others, which it is neceſſary for our own good that they ſhould lie under with reſpect to ourſelves. The Liberty of the Freeſt States never was and never can be more than this; it can only be a Qualified Liberty, as great as is conſiſtent, not with the good of any one citizen, but of all taken together. And when in any ſort of ſociety this is poſſeſſed in ſuch a degree, every wiſe man knows, that he poſſeſſes all which can from the nature of things be had. If there be any, who chuſe to prefer to it the Abſolute Liberty

of a ſolitary State of nature, with them I will not reaſon; but leave them to find in that ſtate an equivalent for all the bleſſings of Society.

'But Conſcience is oppreſſed by ſuch 'conditions.' What, if it be in the power of him, who diſlikes them, not to oblige himſelf to the obſervance of them? if he be at liberty not to make part of that ſociety, which requires it? Can any injury be done; can the conſcience of any be wounded, where the contract is voluntary; where this alternative is offered, either enter into ſuch a ſociety and accept the conditions of it; or abſtain from the one, and be exempt from the other?

'The interpoſition alſo of Human Au-'thority in matters of Religion is uſurp-'ing the Supremacy of Chriſt.' But without

without certain Regulations no Societies can exiſt; as the Societies are Human, the regulations made for them muſt be by Human Authority. We find in the Scriptures the doctrines and precepts of our religion; they are there offered to the reader, who may make what uſe of them he pleaſes; who will underſtand them in that ſenſe, which ſhall approve itſelf to his mind. But if many perſons chuſe to join in an external Profeſſion of this religion, this profeſſion muſt be adminiſtered in a certain form, and by certain perſons; the naked Doctrines and Precepts will not adminiſter themſelves any more, than the abſtract Idea of Juſtice will be ſufficient to anſwer the purpoſes of a State, without applying it, making it effectual, and giving as it were a body to it, by laws.

Whatever Regulations are made for Chriſtian Churches, are ſuppoſed and profeſſed

profeſſed by thoſe who make them, to be agreeable to the commands of Chriſt, to be the means of carrying thoſe commands into execution. Is this uſurping Chriſt's authority? We all, I preſume, acknowledge God to be the Supreme Governor of the world. We are all I ſuppoſe ready to allow, that it is from him we derive our notions of Juſtice; that it is his will we ſhould exerciſe this virtue towards our fellow-creatures. But did any reaſonable man ever conclude from hence, that making Laws for the purpoſes of Practical Juſtice amongſt men was impious with reſpect to God, was intrenching on his ſovereignty? The truth is, that without the interpoſition of Human Authority, in its different degrees, Public Religion and Public Juſtice could not ſubſiſt.

There

There remains another charge on Eſtabliſhments, 'that they impoſe on men 'Human Opinions, and give them an 'Authority, which is only due to Divine 'Revelation.' It has been ſaid before, and is indiſputable, that a certain Agreement of Opinions with reſpect to God is neceſſary for thoſe, who would join in religious worſhip. Now, who is to be judge for any given Society, what thoſe opinions ſhall be? The Society muſt undoubtedly judge for itſelf. The warmeſt advocates for Religious Liberty plead for the right of Private Judgement; that men ſhould be permitted to judge for themſelves. Nothing is more inconteſtible. And ſhall not a Society have the ſame right of judging for itſelf? Is this commendable in an individual, and unlawful in a Society? They may both be miſtaken in forming their opinions; this is the conſequence of human

than infirmity, but they are both the only and the proper judges for themſelves.

And this Judgement on Religious Subjects muſt be exerciſed; for men will differ about them, and the Scriptures, which we all allow to be the Revelation of God, will no more interpret themſelves, than the doctrines contained, teach, or the duties preſcribed in them, execute themſelves. Each Society therefore will adopt thoſe Opinions, which ſeem to them true; and they will be, like all other concluſions of our minds on the ſubjects propoſed to them, Human Opinions; they muſt and can be no other.

Theſe, my Lord, are the principles on which, according to my conceptions, all Religious Societies muſt be founded; that

they are lawful, I think is undoubted; and pretty apparent, that they are neceſſary. For we ſhall find thoſe Sects of Chriſtians, who moſt diſclaim Human Authority and Human Opinions, if we attend to things themſelves rather than to the names by which they are called, are, in fact, from the neceſſity of the caſe, whatever they may profeſs, obliged to uſe them both. The minute regulations of a ſingle Independent Congregation, to which the Members of it muſt conform about the time, place, and manner of worſhip, are the ſame in *kind* with the numerous Laws of an Eſtabliſhed National Church, and differ only in *degree*; it is all of it Human Authority. The Opinions by which the different Congregations of Diſſenters are diſtinguiſhed from one another, and from the Eſtabliſhed Church, are in effect the Confeſſions of Faith of

thoſe

thoſe Congregations *; and theſe all conſiſt of Human Opinions. The truth is, neither We or They are in fault for uſing theſe Human Inſtruments; it is a matter not of choice, but of neceſſity; ſuch is the nature God has given us, that without them Men cannot be made to act together; there can be no Society, either Civil or Religious.

I have been led, my Lord, thus far in diſcuſſing theſe Firſt Principles, becauſe they affect our own Eſtabliſhment in common with all others; though it was not ſo much the intention of theſe Letters, which I take the liberty of addreſſing to your Lordſhip, to controvert the

* In ſome Congregations the Miniſter makes his own Confeſſion in form; in all it muſt be underſtood; for there muſt be a certain Agreement between him and his Congregation.

See Prot. Diſſ. Catechiſm, Part ii. Queſ. 93.

Forms and Opinions of other Churches, as to conſider the Preſent State and Circumſtances of our Own. Before we looked at the Superſtructure, it ſeemed but reaſonable to examine whether the Foundation was as unſound and inſecure, as ſome writers by their confident aſſertions would endeavour to perſuade us. But the Foundation, my Lord, is good; the Rights, which the Church of England exerciſes with reſpect to her own Forms and Opinions, are Rights which muſt belong to Every Church; ſhe does not violate thoſe of other Churches, or of Individuals, by forcing men into her pale againſt their conſent; ſhe claims no independence, no exemption from the power of the Civil Magiſtrate; and makes no pretenſions to Infallibility.

Without Toleration no Eſtabliſhment can be lawful, can be defenſible. The

Right

Right of any Church to chuſe her own Forms and to ſettle her own Opinions can only be maintained (and in what I have already ſaid has only been maintained) on the footing of leaving others to enjoy the ſame Right without injury or moleſtation; of letting them worſhip and teach as they pleaſe, provided their worſhip and teaching be not hurtful to the State; in which caſe only the Civil Magiſtrate can juſtly interpoſe. But the Tolerating Spirit of our Church is a matter of ſuch importance in the preſent inquiry, and Toleration has been enjoyed in this country ſo completely in the preſent age, that it well deſerves to be the ſubject of a ſeparate letter, to which I beg leave to reſerve it.

Civil Government is imperfect, is unable to effect the purpoſes for which it is deſigned, if all ſects, all ſocieties of

men be not equally ſubject to its authority. Of this authority the Church of England does not wiſh to be independent; ſhe ſets up no ſpiritual claims of diſobedience. Our earlier Hiſtory abounds with the miſchiefs ariſing from the incompatible powers of a Pope and a Civil Government; the diſſentions, the wars, the miſeries, which aroſe from hence, are familiar to us; and we are from habit apt to conſider the principle of Eccleſiaſtical Independence as peculiar to Popery. It was indeed maintained by that Church more openly, and more deſperately, (for there was no ſpecies of political wickedneſs that was not employed to maintain it) than by any other; but it is not confined to that alone; it may ſubſiſt under other forms, and be the ruling maxim of other Churches, which profeſs to be the furtheſt removed from Popery; but wherever it be found

it is hoſtile to Civil Government, and deſerves to be treated as ſuch by the Magiſtrate who is the ſupporter of it.

The Church of England regulates her own Forms and declares her own Opinions; but in ſo doing ſhe lays no claim to Infallibility. She judges for herſelf, as an Individual does, and acts accordingly. She ſuppoſes herſelf right, as every Individual muſt do, when he acts to the beſt of his judgement; but does not treat others, as if they were neceſſarily in the wrong *. Whatever is ſaid in our Articles of her Authority can amount to no more than this; it can be interpreted no otherwiſe conſiſtently with other paſſages of the ſame Articles, and

* See Art. 6, 20, and 34; and Hoadly's Anſwer to the Repreſentation of the Committee of the Lower Houſe, &c.

Works, Vol. ii. p. 483.

the general principles of the Reformation, on which they were framed. 'Every Church, as has been already 'said, muſt have Power to decree Rites 'and Ceremonies' for herſelf and for her own uſe, 'and Authority in Contro-'verſies of Faith;' that is, a power of declaring her judgement, in order to determine, what her ſenſe of Scripture is, and her interpretation of it, concerning them. This is a power conſiſtent, as the Church of England profeſſes it to be, with the ſupreme authority of Scripture; and which is in fact exerted, from the neceſſity of the caſe, by thoſe Congregations, who moſt diſclaim it.

The Principles then, my Lord, on which our Eſtabliſhment is founded, I apprehend to be unexceptionable; whether in the application of theſe we have been

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ſo fortunate in all reſpects, is a matter that will admit of more diſpute.

As to mere Forms and Ceremonies, I ſhould have thought all controverſy about them had been at an end, if I had not been lately convinced of the contrary. Opinions are a ſubject of more conſequence; and as it is undoubted, that the Members, and eſpecially the Miniſters of a Church, muſt to a certain degree concur in them; ſo it is no leſs true, that ſuch being the neceſſity, a Public Collection of theſe Opinions, for the purpoſe of Uniformity, ſhould be as ſhort, as plain, and as comprehenſive, as the end propoſed will admit; that the Members of a Church may not be loaded with unneceſſary conditions, or others be unneceſſarily excluded from it.

In

In a large collection of Speculative Opinions, obſcure and diſputable by their nature, it is impoſſible, that great numbers of perſons can perfectly agree; agree I mean after full inquiry and examination; ſome will acquieſce without making ſuch inquiry, others will diſſemble, and all perhaps will think themſelves entitled to uſe a latitude, that is not ſo much authoriſed by the terms in which their Aſſent is expreſſed, as by the general principles of our nature and the conſtitution of our mind. In the mean time the end propoſed will not be anſwered; and it is probably unneceſſary, that it ſhould: Unanimity in that degree will never in fact be produced.

As Chriſtianity alſo ſhould be made as much as poſſible in the public profeſſion of it, what it is in itſelf, a Religion of bene-

benevolence and concord, Chriſtians ſhould be invited by every conciliating, every accommodating meaſure to join in one profeſſion; all invidious diſtinctions, all unneceſſary impediments ſhould be removed; ſmaller differences ſhould be dropped by all parties, provided that in greater things they can be made to agree. Now to multiply the Public Opinions, by which one Church is diſtinguiſhed from others, on thoſe ſubjects eſpecially which are difficult and diſputable, is to multiply the conditions required from thoſe who would accede to it, and to make their union with it leſs practicable.

I confeſs, my Lord, that our Articles appear liable to theſe objections; the particulars of them are too numerous; the ſubjects of ſome of them of a moſt obſcure and diſputable kind, where it may ſeem unneceſſary and perhaps improper to

go ſo far in defining; on both theſe accounts the Aſſent required from our Clergy may appear too ſtrict, and other Chriſtians may be diſcouraged from joining in communion with us.

That ſuch Objections ſhould now lie to our Articles, is what might reaſonably have been expected, notwithſtanding all the abilities of the perſons who compiled them, notwithſtanding all their merits in the common cauſe of Proteſtant Chriſtianity. Men were at that time in ſome meaſure new to the ſubject of Church-Eſtabliſhments; they had not formed juſt notions of Religious Liberty; and Toleration was neither underſtood or practiſed. Theſe topics have been ſince diſcuſſed with freedom and ability; religious prejudices have worn off, and the preſent modes of thinking are become more liberal and tolerant. They did as much

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as could be expected from them; and if their Syſtem be compared with thoſe of other Reformers in the ſame age, the compariſon would probably turn out much to their advantage; but this is no reaſon, why their work ſhould not be corrected and improved at a ſubſequent period, when we are poſſeſſed of great advantages, and furniſhed with conſiderable means of improvement.

Such a Reviſion, my Lord, both of our Articles and Forms, undertaken at a proper time, when the public ſituation of our country will admit of attention to theſe internal concerns of it, under the authority of the State, by the Governors of our Church, the Succeſſors of theſe venerable Reformers, and conducted as it would then be with ſobriety and good ſenſe, would much contribute to her intereſts and honour; the eaſe of her

own Miniſters would be conſulted by it, many objections removed, and the good opinion of reaſonable and moderate men of all parties conciliated.

Might I preſume, my Lord, to ſtate, what appears to me the proper ground for forming a Confeſſion of Faith, for drawing the line of Separation between one Chriſtian Society and another? Every Church will, as ſhe has a right, judge for herſelf with reſpect to her own Opinions. But whatever thoſe Opinions are, the leading and moſt important only, what ſhe judges *eſſential* to True Chriſtianity, ſhould be ſelected and brought forth for Public Uſe; where to diſtinguiſh and ſubdivide is unfit and pernicious. Speculative men in private may do this as they pleaſe; in public it only marks out and multiplies differences. The Baſis of every Eſtabliſhment ſhould be made as

broad

broad as poſſible, that all, who agree in great points, may be comprehended in it. Theſe ſtriking features, theſe leading principles of our Religion are all that ſhould be expreſſed in Forms of Public Worſhip; they compriſe all the Neceſſary Subjects of Public Inſtruction.

Now as the reaſon of requiring from Miniſters an approbation of the Opinions of their Church, is to obtain aſſurance from them, of their being qualified to officiate in the preſcribed Forms of Public Worſhip, and of their conforming to thoſe Opinions in their Public Inſtruction; whatever makes no part either of the one or the other, ſhould alſo make no part of a Confeſſion of Faith; it has nothing to do with the object of it. The Forms indeed of Public Worſhip will neceſſarily contain in them, either expreſſed or implied, all the Doctrines, which are meant

to

to be the ſubjects of Public Inſtruction. The Confeſſion of Faith therefore and the Liturgy of a Church ſhould be Counter-parts to each other; their relation is mutual; if the former contain leſs than the latter, it is deficient; if more, it is redundant; and it is from this redundancy, that reaſonable objections are moſt likely to ariſe.

If therefore that Form of Public Worſhip be the beſt, which, conſiſtently with the Opinions of the Church who preſcribes it, is the moſt ſimple, the moſt intelligible, the moſt comprehenſive; that Confeſſion of Faith, which moſt exactly correſponds to this Form, will be the beſt likewiſe.

LETTER III.

On the Tolerating Spirit of the Church of England.

I HAVE already ſaid, my Lord, 'that without Toleration no Eſtabliſhment can be lawful or defenſible; that the Right of any Church to chuſe her own Forms and to ſettle her own Opinions can only be maintained on the footing of leaving others to enjoy the ſame right without injury or moleſtation; of letting them worſhip and teach as they pleaſe, provided their worſhip and teaching be not hurtful to the State, in which caſe only the Civil Magiſtrate can juſtly interpoſe.' To make others think and believe what You chuſe to preſcribe, is impoſſible; to make them profeſs ſuch

Opinions and Belief, which they have not; to make them obſerve religious Forms founded on theſe, which they eſteem unlawful or diſapprove, is unjuſt. But when thoſe, who diſſent from the majority in theſe things, have the liberty, not of thinking and believing as they pleaſe, for this cannot be taken from them, but of expreſſing theſe opinions and belief by Public Religious Worſhip, as they ſhall chuſe; (the ſecurity of the State being always preſuppoſed) they have every thing, which reaſon and juſtice can require.

Yet it is ſurpriſing, how long men have been in acknowledging principles ſo reaſonable and obvious. When the Proteſtant world broke looſe from Popery, they felt indeed ſufficiently from recent and cruel experience the ſevere tyranny, to which they had been ſo long ſubject. It was natural to ſuppoſe, that they would immediately

immediately renounce thoſe principles, which had been the foundation of it. They abjured the Supremacy of the Pope, and rejected the abſurd religious tenets of his Church; but to grant men liberty in matters of Religion, ſeemed not once to occur to them; the different Sects had no notion of Chriſtianity in any other form than their own, and in this they thought it lawful to oblige all others to concur. Popery, as their common enemy and of the moſt dangerous kind, was treated, and juſtly treated, by all with moſt ſeverity; but there is no reaſon to commend the conduct of the Proteſtant parties towards each other; almoſt every one of them was in its turn intolerant; and as they were poſſeſſed of power, inflicted on thoſe, who differed from them, injuries, not perhaps quite the ſame in degree with thoſe inflicted by the Church of Rome, but the ſame in kind, and to be juſtified

only on the ſame principles. A ſtriking inſtance this of the ſlow and difficult admiſſion of Truth into the Human Mind, when the acceſs is ſhut againſt it by the love of power, by falſe notions of intereſt, and by old prejudices. *

Theſe

* Another inſtance of this, and of men's inconſiſtency with their own principles, was the conſtant oppoſition of America, to the admiſſion of Biſhops for the ſpiritual purpoſes of the Church of England in that country; for I have ever underſtood, and moſt aſſuredly believe, they were intended for theſe only. This I think appears from Archbiſhop Secker's words quoted in Dr. Furneaux's Letters to Blackſtone, p. 191, 2d. edit. with the deſign of ſhewing the contrary. "The propoſal is (ſaith the Archbiſhop) "that the Biſhops ſhall exerciſe ſuch juriſdiction "*over the Clergy of the Church of England in thoſe parts*, "as the late Biſhop of London's Commiſſaries did, "*or ſuch as it might be thought proper that any future* "*Commiſſaries ſhould*, if this deſign were not to take "place." The latter words are marked with Italics by Dr. Furneaux; the former by me; for if the Juriſ-

Theſe intolerant principles, common to almoſt all denominations of Chriſtians, were encouraged by the unhappy civil diſſentions, with which in this country they were connected. Popery may be conſidered, from the Reformation to the times within our own memory, as a moſt determined and dangerous enemy, not of our Church only, but of our State, of all our civil rights and liberties; nothing was too ſanguinary, nothing was too inhuman, for her to attempt for the ſake of recovering her loſt authority. And it is well known what part religious diſcord among Proteſtants had in the troubles of the laſt century; and that the conteſt, which this had fomented, ended in the

Juriſdiction given be *over the Clergy of the Church of England in thoſe parts* and none other, all reaſonable pretence of ſuſpicion ſeems to me to fall to the ground.

ſubverſion of our civil and eccleſiaſtical Conſtitution, and produced all the calamities and injuſtice, which parties inflamed with religious zeal, and irritated by mutual injuries, inflict, when they have power, on each other. After ſuch convulſions of government, where religion and politics have been ſo much blended, it is not eaſy ſoon to conſider them apart; to diſtinguiſh between religious and political principles; and to determine what degree of reſtraint is to be laid on thoſe, whoſe principles are adverſe to the State: What the ſuffering party will be very apt to think oppreſſive and vindictive, the others will repreſent as meant only for public ſecurity and peace. And while the memory of ſuch events is recent, and the animoſities ariſing from them ſubſiſting, it is but too probable, that men's paſſions will always carry them to improper lengths, and make them impoſe

poſe on their adverſaries too hard conditions.

But it has been the happineſs of our times to be removed far enough from thoſe days of confuſion, for us to be exempt from the paſſions, which in our anceſtors were very natural; and to underſtand much better than they did the nature both of Civil and Religious Liberty. For the improvements of liberty in both kinds have gone on together, as from their connection might reaſonably have been expected; the ſubject has been diſcuſſed in all its parts by the ableſt hands; and the juſtice and utility of Toleration is now as much acknowledged by all reaſonable well-informed men, as any maxim reſpecting Public Religion and Civil Government. The chief cauſes alſo of political diſagreement between the Diſſenters and ourſelves have long ceaſed; from the

Revolution we have been all embarked on the ſame bottom of the Settlement then made; and they have had the merit of being, both from principle and intereſt, conſtant Friends to it, and to the Succeſſion of the preſent Royal Family. We have from that time conſidered their intereſts as united with our own in the cauſe of Civil Liberty, which has for its foundation that Settlement and Succeſſion; and it much concerns both us and them not to be perſuaded by any unjuſt ſuſpicions, or party violence, that we are not ſtill Friends, and our great intereſts ſtill the ſame. Our Anceſtors of the laſt century might be in ſome meaſure excuſeable, if they were intolerant, from want of ſufficient knowledge of the ſubject, and from the natural workings of human paſſions. But our paſſions have not been irritated; we have had all poſſible information; it may be expected therefore, that

we

we ſhould act conformably to reaſon and to juſtice.

It will I preſume appear, that we have ſo acted; and that the Toleration enjoyed by the Diſſenters from our Eſtabliſhed Church has been perhaps more complete, than has been enjoyed in any other country by thoſe under the ſame predicament; complete I mean in Fact, though not hitherto complete by Law. For when public affairs appear to have been well ſettled, and have gone on in a courſe of permanent tranquillity, there is always a reluctance (ſometimes too great) in making any alteration in them. Men do not always diſtinguiſh, and often it is not eaſy to diſtinguiſh, the good and beneficial parts of ſuch regulations from thoſe, which are unneceſſary, and grown perhaps inexpedient; they know, that the whole taken together was productive of

good

good, and are therefore afraid of touching any part of it. Alterations in laws never keep pace with the change of circumſtances, which are continually fluctuating; the inconvenience muſt be very apparent, and grow preſſing, before they can be obtained; in moſt caſes a change of opinions and manners muſt long beforehand gradually prepare the way for them.

In conformity to the ſettlement of our Civil Liberties, Toleration was granted to the Diſſenters; nothing could be more reaſonable and more juſt. It was granted on terms, which I apprehend were then ſatisfactory to all parties; eaſe of conſcience was ſufficiently conſulted, the peace of government ſufficiently ſecured*. Since that

* The Diſſenters dwell with pleaſure on an expreſſion of one or two great men, who have ſaid, that

by

that time, the religious opinions of the Diſſenters themſelves have changed, they now cannot or do not chuſe to ſubſcribe to thoſe opinions, which their Anceſtors held, and to which they did not object to ſubſcribe as a condition of their Toleration. What has been the conſequence? The condition has never been exacted; and they have enjoyed the benefits of the Toleration-Act to this day as fully, as if it had not made part of it. For I believe hardly a ſingle inſtance could be produced, when ſuch inſtances were diligently enquired after, of a Diſſenter's having ſuffered for not complying with this condition of the Law. A ſingular

by the Toleration-Act their Public Worſhip was *eſtabliſhed*. It had certainly every degree of Legality given to it, under the conditions preſcribed, by whatever name that is expreſſed; which is of very little conſequence. See Furneaux's Letters to Blackſtone, p. 23, 24, 2d edit.

proof

proof this of the tolerant diſpoſition both of our Civil and Eccleſiaſtical Governors.

However, the Diſſenters wiſhed to be exempted from this condition by Law, from which they had been before exempted only by Connivance; and a few years ago applied twice to Parliament for this purpoſe, in both which applications they were unſucceſsful. I confeſs, my Lord, at the time I much wiſhed, that theſe applications had been complied with. Permit me to ſay, with all deference to our Legiſlature, which was of a different opinion, that they ſeemed to aſk only what was reaſonable, what was conſiſtent with the general principles of Toleration; that it could do no harm to allow them that by Law, which they had long enjoyed in Fact, and of which in future nobody ever thought of depriving them. Perhaps the fate of thoſe petitions

tions did not wholly depend on their own merits, but on ſome circumſtances of the times, which had an unfavourable influence on them. If ſuch an application be again made, I cannot help expreſſing my hopes, that it will meet with a more favourable reception: this only is wanting to render the Toleration of this country with reſpect to the Diſſenters complete.

For although by the Corporation and Teſt Acts they lie under ſome diſadvantages, I do not conceive they ſuffer any injury. I profeſs, I do not underſtand any general indefinite claim of all men indiſcriminately to the Civil Offices of their country; or that the State may not exerciſe her diſcretion concerning the perſons, to whom ſhe may chuſe to delegate any part of her authority. In fact, this is done with reſpect to all Offices; certain qualifications are required, which

exclude thoſe who have them not. There certainly is a conſiderable connection between a Civil Government and an Eſtabliſhed Church; they have a mutual influence, and the form of one ought to be, and generally is, adapted to the other. Hence we ſee, that among Proteſtants in Monarchical countries, the Form of the Church has been for the moſt part Epiſcopal; in Republics, that has been alſo Republican. Church Government will have a relation to political principles; it is unneceſſary to ſay, that it has had in our own country. The Conſtitution of our Church is analogous, is adapted to our Civil Conſtitution; the principles of the Diſſenters concerning Church Government are ill adapted, are unfavourable to ſome parts of it. Without recurring invidiouſly to paſt tranſactions, though there are among the Diſſenters numbers of able and honeſt men, who

would diſcharge any office which ſhould be committed to them moſt unexceptionably, yet the general operation of thoſe principles, when carried to the degree, to which even now we ſee them carried, is not favourable to the whole of our preſent Conſtitution in Church and State, which are not without reaſon conſidered as connected in their intereſts. To exempt men from penalties, which they do not deſerve, is one thing; to delegate to them authority is another; the firſt is a matter of juſtice, the latter of favour and diſcretion; which the State may ſurely refuſe to do, if ſuch authority be likely to operate to her own prejudice. Of this the State muſt judge, and act accordingly *.

* I confeſs, neither the Author of *the Plan of Lectures on the Principles of Nonconformity*, or his *Catechumens*, if they agree with their Teacher in all his opinions, appear to me proper perſons to exerciſe Civil Authority under our Preſent Conſtitution.

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The Diſſenters, by being incapable of Civil Offices, lie undoubtedly under a Diſadvantage; a diſadvantage perhaps as little felt in this country as poſſible, where Induſtry is branched out into ſo many forms, and offers ſuch a choice of uſeful and reputable employments. But it does not ſeem, that they can more juſtly complain of an Injury, than all thoſe perſons who are diſqualified, for want of ſufficient property, from executing different Civil Offices, in almoſt all of which in proportion to their rank a certain amount of it is required; than thoſe, for inſtance, who are excluded on this account from the Houſe of Commons. Numbers of perſons under this incapacity would no doubt make excellent Members of Parliament; and it is not more their fault not to be worth 300l. a year, than it is the Diſſenters' fault to hold religious opinions inconſiſtent with thoſe of the Eſtabliſhed Church.

If certain perſons are unfit to execute Civil Offices, this unfitneſs, whatever may be the cauſe of it, whether poverty, opinion, or any other circumſtance attending them, is a ſufficient ground of their excluſion. Bad effects, produced by religious opinions, are not leſs to be prevented, than other effects equally bad ariſing from other cauſes.

Our Anceſtors, my Lord, had the merit of granting Toleration to Proteſtant Diſſenters; but the public dangers from Popery were then, and continued long after, too alarming, to admit of the Papiſts being comprehended in a plan of religious pacification, and of thoſe Laws being repealed, the rigour of which could only be juſtified by extreme neceſſity. Time and a change of circumſtances ſeem to have in ſome meaſure diſpelled theſe dangers; we have now little to appre-

hend from the attempts of that Religion againſt the State. It is a fortunate circumſtance of our days, that in them a conſiderable body of our Countrymen, who were before conſidered by the Laws as enemies to our Religion and Government, and treated as ſuch, have obtained the confidence of the Legiſlature ſo far, as to be relieved from ſome of the hardſhips under which they laboured, and to be in part admitted to us as Fellow-Citizens and Friends.

For however popular it may be in this country to hold up Popery, as an object of abhorrence, it ſurely is not reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that it can never be entitled to any degree of Toleration. It may be thought, as a matter of ſpeculation only, that, provided the profeſſors of it no longer breathe the ſame ſpirit of independence and hoſtility, provided by their

ſolemn

ſolemn declarations and conduct they give us aſſurance of their being good ſubjects, Reliques and Images and Tranſubſtantiation have little to do with the State; that men's follies and abſurdities, if they are harmleſs to others, are not proper objects of legal reſtraint; and that it is having a very contracted notion of Toleration itſelf, to extend it in the ampleſt form to one ſet of men, and to withold it entirely from another, ſuppoſing that both might partake of it conſiſtently with public ſecurity. It might be thought, that Popery might live as amicably with Proteſtantiſm in this country, as it does in many parts of Germany and in Holland.

But although all this may be true in Speculation, the Practical Stateſman muſt take in other conſiderations. The reaſon of the thing is not always enough

for him to act upon. Before ſuch alterations are made, opinions and prejudices muſt be conſulted; which laſt are abated only by time and experience. We may ſee how ready people are to take the alarm in ſuch matters by what has paſſed in Scotland on this very ſubject; the laſt century could hardly have produced any thing more violent. Without proceeding further, it may be prudent and neceſſary to wait and ſee the effect of a partial relief, both on the opinions of the people at large and the conduct of the party relieved; for it certainly requires ſome experience to be perfectly aſſured, that Popery will not make an ill uſe of any liberty which ſhould be granted to her, conſidering her old reſtleſs ſpirit, and the indefatigable zeal ſhe has always ſhewn for making proſelytes.

The Penal Laws againſt Popery, which diſgrace our Statute-book, have indeed been rendered almoſt harmleſs by the humane and tolerant ſpirit of this country. The moſt ſevere and oppreſſive have been ſuffered to lie dormant and to grow obſolete; they have hardly ever been called forth of late years, except now and then to ſatisfy the mean and vindictive purpoſes of private malice; and the Magiſtrate either finds ſome evaſion not to execute them at all, or does it with reluctance. Unreaſonable Laws, where the puniſhment is out of all proportion to the offence, for the moſt part, in free countries eſpecially, defeat themſelves; the general good ſenſe and humanity of a people are revolted at them, and by preventing their effects almoſt repeal them.

There cannot be a ſtronger evidence of the humane and tolerating ſpirit of the

nation, than this connivance in the caſe both of the Papiſts and Diſſenters, which has in a great meaſure ſupplied the imperfection of our laws; and of this ſpirit I believe the Clergy partake in as large a proportion as any claſs of men in the community. Our Predeceſſors in the Church may many of them, have had their full ſhare of the intolerant character of former times; but if there be a feature in the character of the preſent Clergy peculiarly diſtinguiſhing, it is that of good temper and moderation towards other ſects of Chriſtians; which diſpoſitions have grown more general among them, and been continually extending themſelves even to the preſent times.

Amidſt the illuſtrious patrons of Religious Liberty, ſome of the moſt eminent have ariſen from the boſom of our Church; to name no more than Biſhop Taylor of

the laſt century, and Biſhop Hoadly of the preſent. The cauſe of Toleration in favour of thoſe, who diſſent from us and diſapprove of our Eſtabliſhment, has never been pleaded more earneſtly or more ably, than by ſome of the Miniſters of the Eſtabliſhment itſelf.

And at this time, if we are to judge from all appearances, what can be more reaſonable and moderate than the diſpoſitions of the Clergy towards our Diſſenting Brethren? Can an inſtance be produced of the Biſhops who oppoſed their late applications to Parliament, ever exerting any act of authority to diſtreſs them? Has the Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction in the hands of any ſubordinate Officer ever been employed for this purpoſe? Do the Clergy in their Sermons treat the Diſſenters with want of charity and candour; or endeavour to inſpire their congregations

with bitterneſs or diſlike to them? Are their Writings from the preſs compoſed with a ſpirit of bigotry and party, and filled with ſatire and invective? I profeſs, I know of no Plan of Lectures on Conformity, which can be produced as a counter-part to that, which we have ſeen on Non-conformity.

May this moderation, my Lord, always be the diſtinguiſhing character of the Clergy of the Church of England; it is a character the moſt conformable to the ſpirit of their Religion; it will do them the greateſt honour with all wiſe men, with all true friends of univerſal Chriſtianity. May this moderation continue to influence every part both of their public and private conduct. Men may be good Chriſtians in other Churches as well as in our own; but if we are ſtudious to make Proſelytes that are worth having, this

this moderation is an argument of the moſt conciliating kind; it is even alarming to thoſe, who in this reſpect are our competitors. It is found neceſſary on this very account to put the Diſſenters on their guard againſt us; we are become dangerous to them from our mildneſs *. Nothing, my Lord, which I can add, will be paying ſo high a compliment to our Church.

* See Plan of Lectures, Preface, p. 4.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

On the Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction.

IN Societies, my Lord, which are numerous, whether Civil or Religious, many Regulations are neceſſary, many perſons in Office to ſee that they are obſerved; without them neither the Form or Spirit of ſuch Societies can ſubſiſt; their parts will fall into confuſion, the purpoſes deſigned by them will not be anſwered.

It is not my intention to enter into any of the arguments, deduced from Scripture on the Form of Church-Government, which were debated with ſuch violence in the laſt age. To whatever opinion

different

different parties may be inclined on theſe arguments, it ſeems pretty apparent, that neither Chriſt or his Apoſtles meant to preſcribe minutely thoſe regulations, by which the future Church ſhould be governed in the ſeveral countries where it was to ſubſiſt. What we meet with in Scripture are intimations and examples of their practice concerning this Government rather than direct commands; we do not ſee the form of it delineated at full length, and accurately expreſſed in all its parts, as the Syſtem of the Jewiſh Church was by Moſes in his Law, but only ſome general Out-lines of it: the Divine Wiſdom probably making this difference between a Religion, which was appropriated to a certain People, to a certain Country, to a certain Temple, and that, which was to be diffuſed over the face of the earth, and to take in the various nations of it,

with

with all their differences of climate and manners.

Many things in the regulation of Chriſtian Churches are certainly left at large to be provided for by Human Wiſdom; and I have therefore always conſidered the Government of Civil and Religious Societies as much on the ſame footing; and reducible, wherever the expreſs divine direction is not apparent, to the ſame principles. For God deſigned Man both for Society and Religion; they are both of them equally of his appointment. It is as much his will, that thoſe Civil Laws be obeyed, by which our Lives and Properties are ſecured; as it is, that we ſhould believe thoſe Truths and obſerve thoſe Precepts, which more immediately conſtitute our Religious Duty. But the particular means, by which theſe

purpoſes are to be obtained, the particular regulations, which will beſt produce them, are left in both caſes to be determined by Human Wiſdom, and to be accommodated to the different circumſtances of the Societies, for which they are wanted. Men lie under the ſame obligation to preſerve the purity and influence of Religion in making Eccleſiaſtical Regulations; as they do to conſult the Social Happineſs of Mankind in making Civil Laws.

Without recurring to divine right, nothing ſurely is a more natural mode of governing the numerous Body of Clergy belonging to a conſiderable nation, than to appoint ſingle Men, with ſubordinate Officers, out of their own number to preſide over them in different diſtricts; that is, to govern them by Biſhops. I do not ſee the impropriety of this mode

of

of governing in any country; but if it be thought, that there ſhould be a ſort of analogy in all countries between the Eccleſiaſtical and Civil Conſtitution, I ſhould ſay, that in our own the Epiſcopal Form was more proper than any other for the Government of the Church, from its being moſt analagous to that of the State.

To this Form of Church-Government a Juriſdiction is annexed; Courts of Judicature are held, and juſtice adminiſtered on certain matters, cogniſable in theſe Courts by the Laws of the Land. We ſhall beſt judge of the preſent merits or demerits of this Juriſdiction with reſpect to the Nation at large, of its proper limits and extent, by conſidering the Authority from whence it is derived, and its Operation as it is now adminiſtered.

There

There is no perſon at all converſant in our Hiſtory, who does not well remember the perpetual diſputes and violent convulſions, occaſioned in the earlier periods of it by the adherence of the Clergy to their Roman Law; by their claims of exemption from all Civil Judicature; and by their daring incroachments on the power of the State. Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction was then indeed hoſtile and formidable; and it required all the policy and firmneſs of our ableſt Princes to withſtand and to repreſs it. The memory of this may ſtill prejudice us againſt all Eccleſiaſtical Authority; we may perhaps conſider the Old Papal Juriſdiction as the parent of the Preſent; though the deſcent has gone through ſo many generations, and through ſuch a change of fortunes, that hardly a feature of it remains the ſame.

For

For when our Church was once united with our Civil Government, the whole Authority of both from that time flowed from the ſame ſource; there were no longer ſubſiſting in the ſame country two inconſiſtent Powers; that of the Church became (as it ought to be) ſubordinate and dependent. But for many years after our ſeparation from the See of Rome, neither did our Civil or Eccleſiaſtical Authority wear that mild and humane aſpect, which we now ſee in it; the Church was indeed no longer an enemy to the State; but when the State was arbitrary, it was no wonder, if the Church ſupported by it was oppreſſive; they advanced gradually and hand in hand (as was to be expected) to that happy temper, by which they are at this time both diſtinguiſhed.

The

The Eccleſiaſtical Law of this Country is now, not the Pope's, but the *King's; it makes part of the General Law of the Land, and is derived from the ſame Authority; the Courts, where it is adminiſtered, are ſubordinate, and controulable by the Civil Courts, if ever they exceed the limits preſcribed to them. In this reſpect therefore the Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction ſtands clear of all exception.

The matters, which by the laws of our country are the Objects of this Juriſdiction, are ſome of them eccleſiaſtical, as the Rights and Diſcipline of the Church; ſome of a mixed nature, as Caſes of Marriage; and others purely civil, as Wills and Adminiſtrations. The firſt are the natural and proper objects of it. Mar-

* Blackſtone's Introd. Sect. 3.

riage, being with us not a mere Civil, but partly a Religious Contract, may not unnaturally fall under the ſame cogniſance. But there can be no reaſon, from the nature of the thing, why Teſtamentary Buſineſs ſhould be tranſacted, or the diſputes relating to it decided, in theſe Courts; and that it has been ſo, has only ariſen from the aſſumed power of the Church of Rome over the diſpoſition of Private Property, by which the Mode of Diſpoſing became then cogniſable by Eccleſiaſtical Authority; and from the permiſſion of the General Law of the Land, that this buſineſs ſhould continue to flow in the ſame channel.

But however foreign part of our Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction may be to Religion, either public or private, it is a matter in itſelf of no great importance. The principles, on which ſuch buſineſs is

tranſacted, and cauſes decided, are equally certain with thoſe of the Common Law-Courts, ſome of which have a concurrent juriſdiction in theſe caſes; they are equally conſonant to the General Law of the Land; and the perſons preſiding are often the ſame with thoſe who are intruſted with Civil Authority. The Judge, who preſides in a Conſiſtory Court as Chancellor, or his Surrogate, often executes, and is generally from his ſituation qualified to execute, the powers of the Municipal Law, as a Juſtice of Peace. The deciſions then of theſe Courts are authoriſed by the General Law of the Land; and the Eccleſiaſtical Magiſtrates are of the ſame claſs and rank of men, to whom that Law often delegates ſome of her own merely Civil Power. The Clergy of England are conſidered by her, and juſtly, as equally Citizens with all the reſt of her people, and as equally fit

to be truſted with a degree of Civil Authority proportioned to their rank in the community; to which indeed they are attached by every tie, that can make men intereſted in its welfare.

If thoſe matters, which are certainly not the natural and proper objects of Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction were removed from it to that of our Common Law-Courts, I confeſs I ſhould have ſeen no material objection to it, (except the tranſferring of certain Fees from one ſet of Officers to another ſhould be thought ſuch) had not a much better * judge than myſelf been of a different opinion. "It muſt be acknowledged (ſays he) to "the honour of the Spiritual Courts, "that though they continue to this day "to decide many queſtions, which are

* Blackſtone, B. iii. Ch. 7. Vol. iii. P. 98.

"properly

"properly of temporal cognisance; yet
"justice is in general so ably and impar-
"tially administered in those tribunals,
"(especially of the superior kind) and the
"boundaries of their power are now so
"well known and established, that no
"material inconvenience at present arises
"from this jurisdiction still continuing
"in the antient channel. And, should
"an alteration be attempted, great con-
"fusion would probably arise, in over-
"turning long-established forms, and
"new-modelling a course of proceed-
"ings that has now prevailed for seven
"centuries."

The Forms indeed of these Courts are on the Roman plan, and consequently different from those of the Common Law; but there are other Courts beside the Ecclesiastical, which proceed accord-

ing to the ſame forms, eſpecially the Court of Chancery. We need not heſitate in giving a preference to the mode of Legal Proceeding delivered down to us by our own Anceſtors; but if any inconveniences be ſuppoſed to ariſe from the other mode, theſe are not peculiar to the Eccleſiaſtical Courts, but operate alſo elſewhere in caſes much more important.

Excommunication, my Lord, is unfortunately the inſtrument, by which the Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction is to aſſert its authority. I have no ſcruple in ſaying, that the inſtrument is improper and bad. As ſuch I believe every Eccleſiaſtical Judge uſes it moſt ſparingly, and never employs it without neceſſity; but as no Juriſdiction can ſubſiſt, where an obſtinate Party may ſet it at defiance with impunity,

impunity, the neceſſity will ſometimes occur, when it muſt be employed; if ſubmiſſion can be obtained by no other methods, it muſt be obtained by that, which the Court is impowered to uſe in the laſt reſort. Beſide the ſpiritual part of Excommunication, a part which never ſhould have been applied to theſe purpoſes, many civil diſabilities, and thoſe of the moſt ſerious kind, are immediately incurred by it; * and 'at the end of forty days, 'if the offender does not ſubmit to the 'ſentence of the Court, the Biſhop may 'certify ſuch contempt to the King in 'Chancery, from whence the Writ *de* '*excommunicato capiendo* is iſſued to the 'Sheriff of the County; who ſhall there-'upon take up the Offender, and impriſon 'him in the County Goal, till he is re-'conciled to the Church, and ſuch recon-

* Blackſtone B. 3. Ch. 7. Vol. iii. p. 102.

'ciliation certified to the Biſhop.' I have often wiſhed, my Lord, that the Law in this reſpect was altered; that the effect, or part of the effect of Excommunication might be obtained, as it might eaſily be, without the previous and unbecoming formality of ſpiritual cenſures. Suppoſing an Eccleſiaſtical Judge were empowered in caſes of contempt, where he muſt now excommunicate, after forty days to require by a proper inſtrument the impriſonment of the party in contempt, from the Sheriff or a Juſtice of Peace, on the ſame conditions of delivery, when his ſubmiſſion is certified; a part only of the conſequences of Excommunication would be incurred, but a part ſufficient to ſecure obedience to the Court; the remedy would be had more eaſily, and leſs reluctantly employed; the offenſive uſe of ſpiritual cenſures would be avoided; and the Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction would owe its ſupport, juſt

as

as much as it does now, to the intervention of the Civil Power *.

Eccleſiaſtical Rights and Diſcipline ſeem the natural and proper objects of Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction. The Laity are concerned indeed in many of the firſt; but the deciſions in theſe caſes are the deciſions of the Law of the Land, and ſome of the temporal Courts have a concurrent Juriſdiction, ſo that parties may make their choice; to theſe indeed almoſt all matters of conſequence are at this time carried of courſe. The Laity have little

* Since I wrote this, I find, that a propoſal of the ſame kind was agreed on in Convocation 1714, and intended to be offered to Parliament, that it might paſs into a law. Wilkins's Conc. Vol. iv. p. 654. This deſign dropped on Queen Anne's death, which happened ſoon after. Such a propoſal had before been mentioned in Convocation 1580. ibid. p. 300.

now

now to apprehend from Church-Authority, except the preſentment of a Country Church Warden for any irregularities of life be eſteemed formidable. Canons framed by a Convocation have been declared by the greateſt * Lawyer of his age not binding on the Laity; and juſtly declared ſo, becauſe not iſſuing from the Legiſlature, to which they are ſubject; and the Eccleſiaſtical Courts, if they ſeem ever ſo little to exceed their due bounds, are immediately corrected by the Courts of Common Law.

I am perſuaded, that no reaſonable man among the Clergy would wiſh to carry Church-Power over the Laity a ſtep beyond where it is at preſent fixed; but in what relates to the internal regula-

* Lord Hardwicke—ſee Burn's Preface to Eccl. Law.

tion

tion and diſcipline of the Clergy themſelves, and the due performance of Eccleſiaſtical Duties, the caſe is very different. Let the Power of the Church over others be little, or none at all; but let her have enough to controul and govern her own immediate ſubjects; to make *them* do their duty, and to correct *their* delinquencies. In doing this, let her not be checked at every ſtep by the interpoſition of the Common Law Courts, which in theſe caſes ſeem to uſe rather more than * "a parental authority;" let not every ſlight occaſion be embraced of transferring the matter in queſtion to another judicature. It ſurely is not conſulting the intereſt of the Public at large to weaken the hands of the Officers of the Clergy with reſpect to their own body; to throw embarraſſments and difficulties in their

* See Black. B. iii. Ch. 7. Vol. iii. p. 103.

way,

way, when they would prevent or correct abuſes, of which the Laity are naturally enough very ready to complain, but of which perhaps the weakneſs of Church-Authority in the hands of its Governors is the cauſe.

The Reſidence of the Clergy, for inſtance, is undoubtedly good as a general principle; but is ſubject from the nature of it to a variety of exceptions, which can never be all provided for by any written Law, and which ſhould be left to the diſcretion of ſome ſuperior. The Biſhop is certainly the perſon, who is the proper judge of them; and we may I think preſume, that few men in that ſtation would be ſo unreaſonable as to inſiſt on it indiſcriminately, without any conſideration of circumſtances, in all caſes. As the matter now ſtands, a Biſhop would find it for the moſt part a very difficult,

if not an impracticable, attempt to compel by courſe of Law a Clergyman to reſide on his Benefice. To expect, that the ſubordination of the Clergy ſhould be as ſtrict as that of the Army, would be putting perhaps too ſtrong a caſe. But what ſhould we ſay of an Army, where the Commanding Officer had not power to make a Subaltern join his regiment*?

The Bounds of the Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction have indeed been contracted on all occaſions; hardly any opportunity of doing it has been omitted. That it is

* Next to the Clergy themſelves, it might be thought, that there could not well be a more proper ſubject for Eccleſiaſtical Juriſdiction than a Pariſh-Clerk; but the doctrine of Weſtminſter-Hall ſeems to be, that he is a Temporal Officer, and conſequently not amenable to it. Burn's Eccl. Law. Title Pariſh-Clerk. Pitt and Evans. Parker and Clerke. Peak and Bourne.

ſtripped

ſtripped of its old uſurpations is happy for us all; that it is no longer what it once was, formidable to the State and independent of it; incompatible with the national welfare, and oppreſſive to individuals. It is happy for us, that it is not now, what it was for many reigns even of our Proteſtant Princes after the Reformation, a partaker with them of power too ill-defined, too roughly exerciſed to be conſiſtent with public Liberty. But we may poſſibly have fallen into the oppoſite extreme; and by lowering it too much may have rendered it weak and ineffective with reſpect to that, which is its proper province. It muſt be confeſſed, that it came from a ſuſpicious parentage; it is no wonder, that after ſo many generations ſome may ſtill look on it with a jealous eye, and hardly yet think themſelves ſafe from it; though at this time we might almoſt as well, from the ſame reſemblance

reſemblance of features, be afraid of the Court of Chancery.

While the Eccleſiaſtical Judicature decides well and agreeably to our General Law on thoſe civil matters, which are ſtill committed to it, it is a thing of great indifference from what ſpecies of Court theſe deciſions iſſue. With reſpect to any Cenſorial Power over the Laity, what remains to this Juriſdiction is trifling, I had almoſt ſaid contemptible; and it would perhaps be as well, if even that remnant were taken away. But when we were getting rid of the ſuperfluous and offenſive parts of Eccleſiaſtical Authority, we ſeem to have gone too far, to have cut away without diſtinction, and not to have been ſatisfied with reducing its growth, till we left it without vigour ſufficient for the internal government of our Church.

LETTER

LETTER V.

On the Proviſion of the Clergy.

IN every country, my Lord, the Proviſion for any Claſs of men in it muſt depend on the rank that Claſs holds in the community, on the abilities required from it, and on the induſtry, riches, knowledge, and manners of the country itſelf. Where induſtry is branched out into a variety of employments, which furniſh numbers with a comfortable and reputable ſubſiſtence; and where from the riches of the nation Merit in every branch of it meets with ſuitable encouragement; there every Profeſſion muſt offer to thoſe who engage in it adequate rewards, ſuch as are proportioned to thoſe

of

of other profeſſions which are nearly of the ſame rank. Otherwiſe, amidſt ſo general a competition, that which is below the market-price will find no cuſtomers, and be deſerted.

The proficiency of a nation in knowledge and the arts of life, makes the demand for knowledge in almoſt all profeſſions proportionably greater, multiplies the requiſite qualifications, and increaſes the labour and expence of acquiring them. The manners alſo of a people very much affect all profeſſions in it; and regard muſt be had in them to many things, which at firſt ſight may appear of little or no conſequence: it is very certain, that in almoſt all of them appearances muſt be to a certain degree conſulted, faſhion complied with, and a decorum preſerved, founded more on opinion than on the nature of

things themſelves. Theſe conſiderations acquire ſtrength, the higher the rank is which any particular profeſſion holds in the community, and the greater the abilities which are required from it.

There never was perhaps a Country, where ſo wide and inviting a field was laid open for Induſtry of all kinds as our own; where there was ſuch a choice of ways of life, all of which, if properly purſued, afford a reaſonable proſpect of convenience and comfort. And as this is a country, where riches (and great part of them of the moſt valuable kind, riches acquired by induſtry) abound and are diffuſed throughout the people, Merit of every kind bears here a higher price than elſewhere, and every owner has reaſon to expect he ſhould be better paid for his abilities.

We

We need not I believe fear incurring the imputation of partiality, by ſuppoſing this nation as far advanced in all kinds of uſeful knowledge, poſſeſſed in as high a degree of all thoſe improvements, which enlarge the human mind, and produce convenience and elegance of life, as any which ever yet exiſted. The eighteenth Century will probably always be conſidered as a period, when knowledge and arts abounded and flouriſhed; and wherever the improvements of that period are recorded, our own Country will I am perſuaded hold there a diſtinguiſhed place: But in ſuch a country the individuals of different profeſſions muſt keep pace with the ſtate of general improvement; ignorance in any of them becomes more diſgraceful; the public, to whom profeſſions are accountable, will leſs bear with it.

The advancement indeed of our knowledge, the variety and perfection of our arts, the extent of our commerce, and the multiplicity of our connections render Government in every part of it, whether foreign or domeſtic, complicated and difficult. Government is moſt immediately affected by theſe cauſes; but they operate alſo in ſome degree on all the higher profeſſions of our country.

All the foregoing circumſtances concur in forming our national Manners. Induſtry, Riches, Arts, and Knowledge, wherever they flouriſh, as they do here, civiliſe men; give them ſocial virtues, and qualities, which make life convenient and agreeable. But as all human advantages are attended with their reſpective evils, they civiliſe men to exceſs, and make them pay too much regard (for ſome regard is due) to the diſtinctions in

Society,

Society, which they naturally create. Family and Wealth command amongſt us a degree of reſpect; the owners of them are entitled to it, ſo long as they do not diſgrace their pre-eminence by unworthy conduct. From thus naturally connecting reſpect with theſe advantages of fortune, we almoſt appropriate it to theſe only; we connect them ſo much together, that we cannot conſider them enough apart to beſtow reſpect, where we ſee a total want of worldly advantages. In any ſtation to which reſpect is due, the pureſt virtue and the beſt abilities will not command it from the vulgar, if it be accompanied by what they have been taught to think mean; if it want that external decency of appearance, which they expect from it.

I ſhall now, my Lord, apply the obſervations I have been making to the

Proviſion aſſigned by the Law to our Clergy, and offer ſuch conſiderations as ſhall occur concerning it, and which appear to me to have ſome weight in determining on its general propriety; whether it be ſufficient for the purpoſes deſigned, or too little or too much; whether it be well diſtributed; whether the nature of the property be convenient; and on the whole, whether it be conſiſtent with ſound Policy and public Welfare. But I muſt premiſe, that my reaſonings will only apply to thoſe readers, who think it of importance to the public and private happineſs of mankind, to their preſent and their future exiſtence, that the Belief and Influence of the Chriſtian Religion ſhould be preſerved; and who conſequently think it neceſſary, that an Order of men ſhould be ſet apart to teach and to adminiſter it, without which its Belief and Influence cannot be preſerved;

to thoſe, who will allow, that the Public Profeſſion of Chriſtianity ſhould be ſupported by Civil Government, and a ſuitable Proviſion for its Miniſters aſſigned by it.

It is not leſs neceſſary, that this Proviſion ſhould be adapted to the circumſtances of our Country and Manners, than that of any other claſs of men in the community. Their Qualifications muſt bear a proportion to the general ſtate of Knowledge and Improvement; their expence in acquiring theſe qualifications will alſo be increaſed in proportion to the Riches of the country and the expence of living in it; they will be invited by the advantages of other profeſſions, before they engage in that of the Church; when they have engaged in it, their way of living and external appearance muſt be regulated by preſent manners, and the proviſion for their families by the preſent meaſures of education and ſubſiſtence.

The higher ranks in this country conſiſt for the moſt part of perſons of improved underſtanding; a general degree of knowledge is diffuſed alſo throughout the whole maſs of the people; the Preacher, who is to addreſs them, ſhould certainly be himſelf competently furniſhed with it, in order to acquit himſelf with ſatisfaction to them, or with any degree of reputation to himſelf. Mere Knowledge, a fund of proper topics for religious inſtruction, is not only requiſite, but good Judgement alſo in ſelecting, and applying them, together with ſomething conciliating in the manner of their being conveyed. Men of good ſenſe are diſguſted and diſappointed at hearing Religion ſupported by futile, inſufficient, and injudicious arguments, which are apt to have an unfavourable effect on their general belief of it. And to all hearers ſuch inſtruction comes recommended by being agreeably conveyed, by

having a reaſonable degree of attention paid to the manner, in which it is both compoſed and delivered.

If it be thought, that all this is not wanted to ſatisfy the Country-Congregation of a ſmall village; there are caſes, where it is wanted in a much higher degree. In this land of liberty Religion is attacked with as little reſerve as it is defended; the wit and the acuteneſs of Infidelity are employed againſt it without mercy. That this ſhould be the caſe, I do not think juſt matter of complaint; but it is fit, that the defence ſhould be managed as ably as the attack; that the Body of the Clergy, the natural defenders of Religion, ſhould always afford men qualified for this ſervice, and at leaſt equal to their adverſaries. It is their buſineſs, and a buſineſs which requires the beſt abilities and moſt extenſive knowledge,

ledge, to reſcue the truths both of Natural and Revealed Religion from the ſophiſtry, miſrepreſentation, and ridicule, with which they are often treated; and to eſtabliſh them on the firm foundations of reaſon and good ſenſe. There is a connection between all parts of knowledge; they give mutual aſſiſtance to each other; for a Clergyman to be poſſeſſed of that, which is merely profeſſional, is not enough to make him an able defender of Religion.

It is well known, that the Education preparatory to the Clerical Profeſſion is attended with a very conſiderable expence from the earlier parts of life; an expence nearly the ſame with that, which is neceſſary for the other Liberal Profeſſions; and which has for ſome years increaſed together with the increaſing riches of our country.

The

The Emoluments then of the Clergy ſhould bear a due proportion to thoſe of other profeſſions, that require nearly the ſame abilities, are attended with the ſame expence, and hold the ſame rank in the community. As it is, amidſt the numbers of which this Order conſiſts, there are always in it many men of the firſt abilities; the greater part from decent and reputable, many from the moſt conſiderable families in this country. Should there be a great and evident diſparity to the diſadvantage of this profeſſion compared with thoſe others, can it be expected, that men, who might form reaſonable proſpects of ſucceſs in any other profeſſion from their abilities or connections, will engage in this? The profeſſion muſt itſelf be lowered; it muſt be deſerted by thoſe, who are beſt qualified by their abilities for the firſt ſtations of it; and by thoſe, whoſe perſonal rank and

connections

connections would tend to give it consideration and respect.

The better parts, for instance, of the Law and the Church are made out of the same materials, are composed of men of nearly the same rank, fortune, and education. Is it improper, that a Clergyman of merit in his profession should acquire in it what he might probably have himself acquired at the Bar; and what others in most respects his equals do acquire there? Have they not the same claim to success in their different ways? Should success be thought reputable in one case, and invidious in the other? Is it less proper, that he, who set out a private Clergyman, should become a Bishop, and have a seat in the House of Peers; than that he, who set out a private Barrister, should be an Attorney or Sollicitor General, a Judge, or a Lord Chancellor?

'But

'But such success in the Law is a more 'certain proof of great professional merit, 'than in the Church.' It is admitted. I do not mean to complain of want of rewards in the Church, or of the greatness of them in the Law. I know no character, which deserves more from this country, than that of an able, learned, and upright Legal Magistrate; all honours, all wealth are well bestowed on him; but they far exceed, as perhaps they ought to do, those of the Clerical Profession.

There has been no source both of Nobility and Riches more fruitful, or indeed more truely honourable, than that of the first offices in the Law; the Church also has her Honours and her Wealth. These Honours make part of our Civil Constitution; they are not transmissible to families; why, under this restriction, they are improper,

proper, as the Rewards of a Profeſſion, I confeſs I cannot diſcover. As to Eccleſiaſtical Wealth, where ſhall we find the families, that are built on it? Where ſhall we trace up Modern Riches to an Eccleſiaſtical, as we continually do to a Legal Anceſtor? The Wealth of the Church can in theſe days be very rarely accumulated to any amount; and if it be thus accumulated, it is not abſorbed by her, but flows back again into the ſociety at large.

Take away the rewards of this profeſſion, and men of good proſpects will betake themſelves to other paths of life; they will be determined by the ſame motives in the deſtination of their Children. It is a ſubject, in which prudential conſiderations muſt have their due weight; thoſe profeſſions, which are moſt reputable and promiſing, will of courſe be moſt purſued;

ſued; no one profeſſion has a right to claim a preference with reſpect to the virtue of its members, when in all of them, by acting well, men may be equally good, may alike do their duty to God and to their Country.

But dropping the conſideration of what may be called the prizes of the Clerical Profeſſion, it ought to afford to all its members a Subſiſtence adapted to the rank they hold, to the office they diſcharge in the community. They muſt if poſſible maintain an appearance, which will procure them ſome reſpect from the bulk of the people, who are governed by appearance; whatever looks like meanneſs, whatever expoſes them to contempt will not only lower the perſonal regard paid to them, but will hurt their miniſterial character, will in ſome meaſure diſqualify them from acting with effect in it.

For

For in our preſent ſtate of manners it is in vain to expect, that the people ſhould ever treat Poverty, however reſpectable in itſelf, with reſpect; it depreciates in their eyes every other quality.

The Profeſſion therefore ſhould afford all its members a reaſonable proſpect of ſuch a ſubſiſtence, as will ſupport the rank they hold, and the appearance in the world that is expected from them; and this muſt be eſtimated from our preſent habits, from our preſent modes of thinking; what would provide decently for a Clergyman in Switzerland, or in the remoteſt parts of our own Iſland, is not a meaſure applicable to the greater part of the Engliſh Clergy.

Their income is from the nature of it more known than that of other profeſſions; it is expected, that they ſhould live

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in a way proportioned to it; and even thoſe, whoſe income is more affluent, have it on this account leſs in their power to make conſiderable ſavings, than men in moſt other ſituations of life.

Upon the whole; a probable judgement may I think be formed, whether the general Proviſion for the Clergy be more than ſufficient for their reaſonable demands, from the following conſiderations. Are they in general able to improve the fortunes of their families? To leave their Children in a better ſituation, than they were in at the ſame age themſelves? To qualify them for employments of a ſuperior rank and of higher pretenſions, than their own? It ſeems to me clearly, that they are not able; and therefore, if their character be not extravagance, for which as a general charge I know no reaſon, their Proviſion is not more than ſufficient;

it only leaves their families, where it found them.

That there ſhould be a difference of rank and income among the Clergy ſeems as proper, as in almoſt all other ways of life, where the ſame difference generally obtains. To riſe from lower degrees in a profeſſion to higher, either from merit or long ſtanding in it, is the natural progreſs of human life. It is neceſſary for the purpoſes of government and ſubordination; it is proper, as a ſpur to emulation, an encouragement to merit, and a reward of long ſervices. The inequality however may be greater than theſe purpoſes require, and it may not always operate in ſuch a manner as to encourage merit, and to reward long ſervices.

It is certain, that intereſt and connections will have their weight in the diſtri-

bution of Church-preferments. Succeſs in the Law is, as I before obſerved, a more certain proof of profeſſional merit. It may ſometimes happen in the Church, that great advantages may be obtained, where there is little or no merit; it may alſo happen, that the moſt deſerving may be left in obſcurity and neglect. The more common caſe is, that great Eccleſiaſtical Advancement is the joint effect of both intereſt and merit; yet there are numberleſs inſtances, where the latter alone and unaſſiſted procures what is comfortable and affluent; ſome, where it attains the higheſt dignities of the Church.

It is fit, that the revenue of its Governors ſhould be ample; equal to the rank aſſigned them in our country; neither is there any reaſon, as I ſaid before, why the reſt of the Clergy ſhould all be on a level: but the diſproportion ſeems in

many inſtances too great. All ſhould have what is ſufficient for a decent Subſiſtence; without it men are cramped, diſcouraged, and in ſome meaſure diſqualified for the duties of their office. None ſhould have from the Church (for of men's private fortunes I am not ſpeaking) ſuch an exceſs, as leads rather to luxury and diſſipation than the regular and ſerious diſcharge of their clerical functions, and makes the comparative ſituation of others humiliating and unpleaſant. In many inſtances accidental cauſes have contributed to a diſproportion between the income of preferments and the duties attending them. A change of circumſtances has often taken place, ſince that diſtribution of Church-revenues was made, which ſtill ſubſiſts. Villages, which were inconſiderable, are become populous; Towns have ariſen on ſpots, which were not inhabited; and thoſe

places are not uncommonly the worſt provided for by legal rights, where the Parochial duties are the moſt laborious.

But this inequality of the conditions of the Clergy will not be thought ſo great, as at firſt ſight it may appear, if we attend to one conſideration. Competence is a relative thing; and is meaſured by that, which the education, habits, and connections of each individual have taught him to expect, and have made in ſome degree neceſſary to him. The numerous body of our Clergy is compoſed of a great variety of materials; if the bulk of it be produced from the middle ranks of life, thoſe nearly on a footing with itſelf, yet the moſt conſiderable families in this country contribute likewiſe their part, and there is a large portion, whoſe origin is far below it. The younger Son of a Nobleman or Gentleman of property

is not *for him* perhaps better provided for by what is thought great Preferment, than the Son of a Mechanic, whoſe Father was juſt able to get him into the Profeſſion, is by a ſcanty and obſcure Country Living: the natural wants and expectations of both, at their ſetting out in life, may perhaps be equally anſwered; both may have what is to them competence in the ſame degree. And thoſe, whoſe origin is low, whoſe connections are mean, are the perſons, that will of courſe moſt ſuffer in the unequal diſtribution of eccleſiaſtical revenues; the others will be the gainers by it.

The greateſt part of the Proviſion of the Clergy ariſes from Tithes; a ſort of property appropriated to them in this country from high antiquity; and adapted in many reſpects to an Owner, whoſe profeſſion it is not to cultivate land, and who

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is only Tenant for Life. It is managed with eaſe, without the trouble or expence of a continued courſe of agriculture. It is not liable to the injury, which land will ſuffer from a careleſs or diſtreſſed predeceſſor. It is as much a diſtinct property, as the land from whence it ariſes; it was neither purchaſed by the Landlord, nor is it rented of him by the Tenant. Yet this property has alſo its inconveniences. The interference of it with that of the Occupier of the land is unpleaſant, and productive of diſputes, to be avoided if poſſible in all caſes, but eſpecially in that of a Clergyman and his Pariſhioners. Diſputes between them leſſen or deſtroy his influence, and in ſome meaſure defeat the purpoſes of his paſtoral character. Tithes have been thought not favourable to induſtry and improvement, in the trouble and expence of which men will not ſo readily

engage, when another is to ſhare in the advantages. There muſt be ſome truth in this, though it does not ſeem from the ſtate of this country, as if it had produced in any conſiderable degree this effect.

Where Incloſures are made by Act of Parliament, (a mode of Improvement, by which the national ſtock of wealth ariſing from the produce of land is greatly increaſed) in the new diſtribution of property, this inconvenience is uſually avoided by giving a ſeparate portion of land as an equivalent for Tithes. The Clergyman's property, thrown into this ſeparate form, no longer interferes with that of his Pariſhioners, and it is liable to no objections as unfavourable to induſtry; but the general expediency of it may admit of ſome doubt, as in this form it may become leſs convenient to the owner, and leſs adapted to the ſituation of a Tenant for life.

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The property of Eccleſiaſtical Bodies conſiſts for the moſt part of lands granted for Lives or a Term of years. The ſmall Rents Reſerved on thoſe eſtates is an income of the moſt certain kind, leaſt ſubject to variation or accident; and therefore peculiarly fitted to anſwer the ſtated demands of ſuch Bodies. Fines on the Renewals of theſe Grants are of a more contingent kind; and muſt be conſidered as ſuch by thoſe, to whom they belong. This part of the income of the Church has been in general managed with great moderation; on theſe renewals much leſs than the real value, often not more than half of it, has uſually been demanded. It is I think much to be wiſhed, that this moderation ſhould always be preſerved; the holders of this kind of property have an equitable claim to it, from its value having been long eſtimated and the price determined on this preſumption. Men

are alſo governed in ſuch things more by habit, than by ſtrict notions of right; and pay a larger ſum, which they expect to pay, with leſs reluctance, than a ſmall one which is due by the cleareſt right, but to the payment of which they have been not accuſtomed.

Somewhat of the ſame objection may be made to eſtates for Lives or Years, which I before mentioned as applicable to Tithes, that they may be in ſome degree unfavourable to improvement, the advantage of which is not clearly received by the improver, but muſt in a ſmall part be continually repurchaſed at ſucceſſive renewals. And there have been very lately a few inſtances of a partition of this kind of property by the intervention of the Legiſlature ſomewhat ſimilar to that, which has been made in Tithes. An average of all the profits of a Leſſor has been computed

puted for a ſufficient length of time, and this made an annual charge, as a Fee-farm Rent, on the Eſtate, which is enfranchiſed and becomes Freehold to the Leſſee; a proper part of this new Rent being reſerved in Corn, to guard againſt the fluctuation of the value of money. The objection on the ſcore of Improvement is taken away; diſputes on the terms of Renewal prevented, and the revenue to the Eccleſiaſtical Owner is rendered certain inſtead of contingent. Theſe advantages are obvious; but the objection to this mode ſeems to be, that the Agreement between the Leſſor and the Leſſee being made once for all on the footing of the preſent value, the former and his ſucceſſors will be excluded from all advantages of future improvement.

All ſuch changes of property both with reſpect to Tithes and Eccleſiaſtical Leaſes, muſt

muſt be made on proper terms, adapted to each particular caſe; for no general proportion can be laid down, which will be applicable either to the one or to the other. To induce an alteration of theſe kinds of Property on any other plan would occaſion great confuſion and injuſtice; conſidering the length of time they have ſubſiſted in their preſent form, and how widely they are diffuſed over the nation. For they are not confined to Eccleſiaſtical Owners; the Impropriations poſſeſſed by Laymen, the Grants made by Civil Corporations and private Proprietors, fall under the ſame deſcription, and are liable to the ſame objections.

The Engliſh Clergy do indeed ſucceed the Roman Catholic Clergy of this country in part of their poſſeſſions, but it is only in part of them; a large portion was at the Reformation and afterwards diverted

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to other purpoſes, and does not belong to our Preſent Clergy, who have very different merits with the public. The ſhare of their Predeceſſors before that time was large out of all proportion; and this will appear in a much ſtronger light, if we conſider, that the whole of the property of the Church bore then a much greater proportion to the national wealth, than the ſame property would do at preſent; and muſt have operated accordingly. At this time, when the Wealth ariſing from Induſtry, Arts, and Commerce is ſo prodigiouſly increaſed ſince the period of which we are ſpeaking, the ſame quantity of Landed Wealth will no longer have the ſame influence and effect.

It was perhaps the Maſter-piece of Roman policy to ſecure the dependence of her Clergy, by declaring them free from all civil ties, by rendering them incapable

capable of forming natural connections, and thereby detaching them from the countries, to which they belonged. Men, who diſclaimed the authority of Civil Judicatures, who had no domeſtic pledges to bind them to their country, we juſtly treated with ſuſpicion and diffidence. On this account the Roman Clergy were not properly Citizens; on the contrary, as the ſituation of the Engliſh Clergy is directly oppoſite in theſe reſpects to that of their predeceſſors, they perhaps have as juſt pretenſions to the character of Good Citizens, as any of their Fellow-Subjects; they are led to be ſo by every natural and civil intereſt. They profeſs by the principles of their Church an entire dependence on Civil Authority; to that they owe the Proviſion on which they ſubſiſt, and the Rank which they hold in the community; and perhaps there is no claſs of men in our country, whoſe domeſtic

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and family connections attach them more to the public welfare of it.

To ſuch a Clergy, my Lord, it is, I ſhould apprehend, conſiſtent with every principle of ſound Policy to aſſign a Proviſion in all reſpects ſuitable to their office and rank; if the Chriſtian Religion be of importance to mankind, if the Public Profeſſion of it be fit to be ſupported, and a certain Order of men neceſſary for the adminiſtration of it: theſe things I have taken for granted in this inquiry. There is perhaps room for many improvements in the nature and diſtribution of this Proviſion; but there ſeems little reaſon to think, that it is on the whole too large, that the proſpects of this Profeſſion are too inviting, or that it is ſet above the level of thoſe others, which are filled by perſons of the ſame original fortune, education, and rank. A Barriſter, a Phyſician,

Gentlemen

Gentlemen of the Army or Navy, a Merchant, with tolerable qualifications and prudent conduct, have all of them a reaſonable proſpect in this country of obtaining for themſelves a decent Subſiſtence, a competent Proviſion for their families; any degree of eminence uſually gives them Reputation and Affluence; and high Honours with great Wealth are the prizes, which often fall to the ſhare of the moſt fortunate and moſt diſtinguiſhed. With reſpect to the Clergy, Family-Honours and exceſſive Wealth are out of the queſtion; but I confeſs I can ſee no reaſon, why an Engliſh Clergyman has leſs pretenſions to all other advantages of a liberal profeſſion, than thoſe, who ſet out with him from the ſame beginnings in life, but as they advance take other paths in it.

LETTER VI.

On the Learning of the Clergy, and the Freedom of Inquiry.

GENERAL Learning, my Lord, is in ſome degree profeſſional to the Clergy; their education uſually affords the means of it; and their way of life, removed for the moſt part from the more active and buſy employments of the world, gives them opportunities, which other men have not, of cultivating and extending it. The Learning immediately required of them is certainly that, which has a direct reference to their duties, without which they cannot diſcharge them ably and effectually. But, as I before obſerved, almoſt all kinds of

knowledge have ſome connection, and are uſeful mutually to each other; and if there are parts of it, the utility of which is leſs apparent, we may at leaſt admit its claim even in theſe to ſome regard as a liberal accompliſhment.

We muſt judge from the Writings of our Clergy, on religious ſubjects, compoſed either for the Public in general or for the Inſtruction of their particular congregations, of their merit in that Learning, which immediately belongs to them.

And if there be a ſort of Merit, to which the Clergy of England have a more indiſputable claim than to any other from the times of the Reformation downwards, it is certainly that of Clerical Learning. I think I may venture to aſſert, that the Clergy of no country have produced from that period to the preſent ſo many able

Writers

Writers on the ſubject both of Natural and Revealed Religion; that the truths and duties of both have been no where confirmed, explained, and taught with more knowledge, with ſounder reaſoning, with more good ſenſe; that the attacks made on both have no where been repelled more ably; and the cauſe of Proteſtant Chriſtianity againſt the Church of Rome more ſucceſsfully defended.

I do not apprehend, that the preſent Clergy would on inquiry be found in theſe reſpects unworthy of their Predeceſſors. The ſtate of Learning, like that of other human things, is ſubject to continual change, is affected by the circumſtances of times; our modes of thinking, and of expreſſing our thoughts differ in different ages; the demand alſo for particular ſorts of Learning is different, according to the queſtions, which are agitated,

and the opinions, which prevail. Viewing things in this light, I am not ſenſible, that our preſent Clergy are unworthy Succeſſors of thoſe eminent and venerable Men in that particular, where their reputation ſtood higheſt; that this merit of our Church is not tranſmitted down entire to our own times.

For much of controverſial Learning there is no longer the ſame demand. At the Reformation and long after it, we were contending for the very eſſence of Religion; our moſt valuable rights, as Chriſtians and as Citizens, were concerned in the diſpute; it was neceſſary to direct our principal force to this quarter. Proteſtantiſm was alſo unfortunately divided in itſelf; and much unneceſſary controverſy about trifles between the different ſects of it engaged men's attention and abilities, which would have been better employed

employed againſt that Church, from whoſe tyranny they had all been juſt reſcued; or in eſtabliſhing and defending the great truths of our common Chriſtianity. Happily for our times theſe controverſial weapons have been little wanted: Popery in this country is no longer an enemy worth contending with; and the Diſſenters we have, I think, long conſidered as Friends, between whom and ourſelves no cauſe of animoſity ſubſiſted, though ſome difference of opinion. Our Modern Clergy have, I believe, much leſs controverſial learning than their Predeceſſors, becauſe there has been much leſs occaſion for it: a happy circumſtance for us; Religious Controverſy, as it has been uſually carried on, being more apt to irritate the paſſions of the reſpective parties, than to convince their judgement.

The Writings of our Predeceſſors were more voluminous than ours; the controverſial manner naturally led to this; it was alſo the faſhion of the times; Readers as well as Writers had, if you pleaſe, more induſtry, certainly more patience, than at preſent. Almoſt every kind of compoſition aſſumed a prolix form, which ſuited the public taſte, and with which it was therefore the inclination and intereſt of the writer to comply.

It muſt be confeſſed, that in theſe days we have had an opportunity of profiting by the labours of our Predeceſſors, and we may be reaſonably expected to have improved upon them. In works of mere genius Predeceſſors afford little help; in thoſe of mere ſcience they afford the greateſt. The ſubjects of Religious Learning are of a middle nature, in which great

advantage is to be derived from thoſe, who have gone before us; though not ſo great as in ſubjects ſtrictly ſcientifical. And I preſume, that we ſhall not appear to have made an ill uſe of that ſtock of Religious Knowledge, which we have thus inherited.

The great truths both of Natural and Revealed Religion, and the duties reſulting from them were perhaps never more ably diſcuſſed than by the Divines of our Preſent Church; theſe ſubjects are for the moſt part well underſtood, and the reaſoning employed to eſtabliſh them is juſt and convincing. For different ages have different modes of reaſoning; it ſhould ſeem as if the Human Mind were conſtituted differently at one time and another, from the different manner, in which it is at ſuch times affected. We in many inſtances reject as futile and

fallacious that reaſoning, which our anceſtors were ready to take for ſtrict demonſtration. Things, which they conſidered as important enough to occaſion the moſt ſerious and unhappy diſputes, we now treat, and many of them very juſtly, as the mereſt trifles. We are perhaps hardly fair judges of our own comparative merits; but ſurely there is in the reaſonings of the preſent age a degree of good ſenſe, which we do not find ſo generally in our earlier Writers, and ſtill leſs in thoſe of other countries. If there be any truth in this, it is in no inſtance more true than on religious ſubjects; they are treated by our ableſt Writers, and of ſuch I am ſpeaking, with more good ſenſe and ſound reaſoning, than they have ever been before.

If we conſult the theological writings of other Chriſtian countries, we ſhall, I

believe, ſoon be convinced of this with reſpect to them. But even in reading ſome of the moſt celebrated Authors of Antiquity on philoſophical ſubjects, which are of the ſame nature and often coincide with religious ſubjects, I have frequently been led to reflect on the apparent inferiority of thoſe Authors, with reſpect to juſt reaſoning, to the more eminent of our modern Divines. We muſt diveſt ourſelves of ſome prejudices, before we can venture to prefer an Engliſh Sermon, even of the firſt rate, on a philoſophical or moral ſubject to a Dialogue of Plato, an Eſſay of Cicero or Plutarch; but with all reverence to thoſe great men be it ſaid, there will probably appear in the former, not perhaps the ſame elegance of form and language, but more good ſenſe and juſt reaſoning. It is not, that the abilities of any Modern Divine are ſuperior to thoſe of theſe illuſtrious

Ancients;

Ancients; but our Religion has given us a more perfect knowledge of these subjects, and this is an age, with us at least, of better reasoning.

Good sense and a just manner of thinking arrange and employ the materials of what is commonly called Learning; make Knowledge useful and applicable to the important purposes of life. With the learning and knowledge also, which immediately belong to their Profession, our Clergy are eminently furnished. An acquaintance with general History, as connected with Revealed Religion, as well as with the particular History of the Religion itself, with Christian Antiquity, with the opinions and practices of Christians in different ages, especially those relating to our own country, is all of it in some measure necessary to Clerical Learning; but the great source, from whence all our

Knowledge

Knowledge of Revealed Religion is derived, are the Holy Scriptures. In thoſe other auxiliary branches of learning there is, I believe, no reaſon to complain of any deficiency; but in this moſt eſſential one, the ſtudy of the Holy Scriptures, the languages in which they were written were perhaps never better underſtood. With reſpect to the Old Teſtament, a new field of Criticiſm is laid open in it, to which our Anceſtors had no acceſs, and which will much contribute to reſtore that part of our Scriptures to their integrity, and to render our knowledge of them more accurate. For Commentaries on the whole Body of the Scriptures, we are indebted to many learned men of our own and of other countries, who have gone before us; their opinions thus collected are valuable and deſerve to have weight with us; but we do not fail to judge for ourſelves and to improve on

their

their labours; particular parts have been ſelected, and illuſtrated by able and maſterly Criticiſm, and we are continually adding to our ſtock of Scriptural Knowledge. We ſhall ſoon be furniſhed with moſt of the proper requiſites for an undertaking, which would do honour to the preſent age, as well to thoſe who ſhould authoriſe it, as to thoſe who ſhould conduct it with ſucceſs; a New Tranſlation of the Scriptures. You, my Lord, have pointed out the way to us; and it will be well, if we can follow You at ſome diſtance.

Although the ſpirit of Controverſy between different denominations of Chriſtians be in our days much ſubſided, yet there never was more frequent occaſion to repell the attacks made on Chriſtianity itſelf. Such is the Freedom of theſe times and of this country, that no ſubject is treated with leſs reſerve and tenderneſs,

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than the Religion of it; it is attacked in all ways, by ſubtle and acute reaſoning, by learning, by the lighter ſorts of writing which are agreeable and captivating; all readers are addreſſed in a way ſuited to their reſpective taſtes; ſerioufneſs, ridicule, and irony are employed, as beſt anſwers the purpoſe; which laſt is more offenſive, becauſe it is unneceſſary. It is ſufficiently plain, that with reſpect to Chriſtianity at large the Freedom of Inquiry is not cramped by any influence of the Church or any coercions of the State. It is, I believe, the general ſenſe of the Clergy, that when the truth of Religion is called in queſtion and attacked, civil reſtraints are foreign to the defence of it; that reaſon and argument are the only arms to be uſed for that purpoſe; and that on theſe its defence may be ſafely reſted, if it be, what they truſt it is, founded in truth and derived from God. To them,

them, who are entruſted with the public adminiſtration of it, the province of defending it naturally belongs; and from them have iſſued, as occaſions have required, the ableſt Apologies for Chriſtianity, which the world ever ſaw: its general principles have been eſtabliſhed, objections in all their different forms have been anſwered, with more ſolid learning, ſounder reaſoning, and more good ſenſe, than perhaps in any country, ſince the firſt propagation of it.

The learning and abilities of the Engliſh Clergy, not only in defence of Chriſtianity againſt its adverſaries, but in their general treatment of Religious Subjects, in their knowledge and interpretation of Scripture, in their explanation of the doctrines and duties of the Goſpel, have always been held in high eſtimation by moſt of the other Proteſtant Countries

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in Europe. In Germany, as I am well-informed, Engliſh Divinity ſtands high in reputation; and is conſidered as a neceſſary part in the courſe of Clerical Studies to thoſe, who profeſs to attain in them any great degree of proficiency and eminence.

Far be it from me, my Lord, to detract from the merit of our Diſſenting Brethren for their joint labours with us in the common cauſe of Chriſtianity. On the contrary, I have always conſidered them as Friends and Aſſociates engaged in the ſame work; I have always ſeen with pleaſure our agreement on the great truths and duties of Religion; and think it for the moſt part a recommendation both of their performances and ours, where the differences ſubſiſting between us are not marked; when the party, from which they come, cannot be diſtinguiſhed.

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In ſuch performances the merit of our Diſſenters will always be acknowledged by every impartial judge of Learning, by every friend of Chriſtianity; in ſuch we ſhall both of us do real ſervice to mankind, and acquire laſting reputation; while Poſterity will deſpiſe and forget moſt of the paltry Controverſies, with which our differences are continued and fomented.

The Reſtraint laid upon Opinions, the want of Freedom of Inquiry in religious ſubjects, is an inconvenience conſtantly charged on Eſtabliſhments; in this reſpect it might be ſuppoſed, that thoſe, who diſſent from our Church, would have greatly the advantage of us. Yet in fact even the Diſſenters can hardly propoſe their opinions with more freedom, than the Clergy of the Eſtabliſhed Church; they can hardly cenſure that Church more

unreſervedly,

unreſervedly, than ſome of her own Members take the liberty of doing. A Clergyman does not indeed always in ſuch caſes profeſs himſelf the Author to the public by name; but it is generally as well known and underſtood, as if the name were written in capitals.

It muſt be confeſſed, Opinions are ſometimes propoſed, not very conſiſtent with the former ſolemn Profeſſions of their Authors. But who now ever hears of any thing like coercion or puniſhment? Is Hereſy now a crime, that occurs in our Eccleſiaſtical Courts? Is it in any danger from Convocations, which are become of all public Aſſemblies the moſt unimportant and moſt innocent? In truth, the imputation of inconſiſtency is perhaps in the preſent ſtate of things the moſt powerful reſtraint of opinions, that contradict thoſe, which have the ſanction of public au-

thority. The liberty, thus taken and carried to ſuch a degree, as we ſometimes ſee it, may not itſelf be very conſiſtent with the ſpirit of our Old Church and with the Forms of her Legal Conſtitution; but in this as in other matters men are relaxed in their ways of thinking; the general opinion favours this liberty; which in fact is enjoyed as fully, as if it were expreſsly allowed by the Laws of our Church; certainly as fully, as any moderate and reaſonable men can deſire. It is like our Toleration, which, though not complete by Law, yet has been completely exerciſed in Fact.

Every ſort of Liberty may be carried to an extreme; but without a conſiderable degree of it, in religious as well as other ſubjects, learning is fettered, prejudices are continued, and improvement is ſtopped; it is better, that it ſhould ſometimes exceed

exceed its bounds, than be too much reſtrained; the field is always open for reaſon and good ſenſe, to check what is extravagant and abſurd. Of this moderate liberty the Clergy of England have made an excellent uſe in the promotion and improvement of every branch of religious knowledge. Neither have they any reaſon to fear, that thoſe reſtrictive Laws, which have lain ſo long dormant and obſolete, ſhould ever regain their life and vigour; on the contrary, the progreſs of things will certainly be made the other way, and Written Laws will at length accommodate themſelves to Prevailing Opinions. It is laudable and ingenuous in our own Clergy, when occaſions offer, to point out defects and to ſuggeſt amendments in our Eſtabliſhment; it is honourable with reſpect to the Church herſelf, which allows this liberty to her members. But ſuch writings ſhould preſerve that de-

corum and moderation, which is conſiſtent with the relation the Authors of them bear to the Church, of which they treat. Satire and Invective againſt her will do no credit either to the good ſenſe or good temper of a Writer of any denomination; but muſt come with peculiar impropriety from thoſe, who have profeſſed allegiance to her laws, and who ſubſiſt by her appointments.

The religious Learning then of the Engliſh Clergy ſeems in no danger of having its progreſs ſtopped by unreaſonable reſtraints; its growth has been accordingly vigorous, and its produce abundant. But Learning, ſtrictly ſpeaking profeſſional, is not only what may be expected from ſuch a Body of men; we may reaſonably hope to find among them a general literary character, a degree of proficiency, and in ſome inſtances of eminence,

eminence, in almoſt every branch of knowledge. Their own education, and the province which often falls to them of educating others, open a field in which they may purſue different parts of learning; though that, which properly belongs to them, be their chief object. And this is connected with knowledge of almoſt every kind; a relation ſubſiſts between the various branches of it; they mutually aſſiſt and promote each other; and by their general connection the mind of a ſpeculative and ſtudious man is imperceptibly led from one purſuit to another. In all the different views, which may be taken of Religion, in order to eſtabliſh it and to obviate the objections which may be made to it, it is hard to name a part of knowledge, that may not have its uſe; and for compoſition of every kind on religious ſubjects, it is obvious, how requiſite it is for the Clergy to be well

acquainted with the beſt Authors of all ages, as patterns of good writing and juſt reaſoning, if they hope to acquit themſelves with reputation and effect. On the whole it is not unreaſonable to expect, that there ſhould be a general ſtock of uſeful and liberal knowledge lodged, as a depoſit, in the hands of the Clergy.

In ſpeaking of numerous bodies of men and the qualifications required from them, we ſpeak of them always in the bulk. Every individual will not anſwer the general character; great eminence is, and ever was, confined to a few; if the greater part of a profeſſion be competently qualified, and the number of thoſe deficient comparatively ſmall, it is perhaps all, that can in the nature of things be expected. The different ſituations alſo of the Clergy, and the different ranks of people with whom they are to officiate,

make their general qualifications requiſite in very different degrees: in ſome ſituations they are all wanted; in others the beſt and moſt excellent would be thrown away; they would be inapplicable and uſeleſs.

From the times of the Reformation downwards, the reputation of the Church of England has certainly ſtood high for Religious Knowledge and Uſeful Literature. Have the Holy Scriptures in any country been more ſtudied, or better illuſtrated by ſound learning and true criticiſm? Have the truths and duties of Chriſtianity been any where explained more ably, or more faithfully inculcated? Has Chriſtianity itſelf been any where more ſucceſsfully defended by the united force of reaſon and of learning? Has religious knowledge been any where proſecuted with leſs reſtraint? How far the Body of

our Clergy may now be qualified to keep up the reputation of their Church may perhaps in ſome meaſure be collected from the foregoing letter; at leaſt it may not become me too peremptorily to decide on it; but, my Lord, I hazard nothing in ſaying, that we have certainly ſome names now among us, which will do no diſcredit to the moſt illuſtrious of our Predeceſſors.

LETTER VII.

On the Public Forms, and on the Duties and Manners of the Clergy.

WHOEVER, my Lord, has well conſidered the difficulty of compoſing Addreſſes to God, fit for public uſe, not unworthy of the Being who is worſhipped, and yet intelligible to the meaneſt of his worſhippers; whoever has well conſidered the judgement and ſobriety of mind, which are neceſſary on a ſubject, in which we are ſo apt to indulge a warmth of imagination and to miſtake it for piety; will not heſitate in determining, whether it be moſt expedient to have the addreſſes, made to God in Public Worſhip, conceived in certain

general and preſcribed Forms, or to have them left to the diſcretion and abilities of each particular Miniſter. To perform them, when thus left to the Miniſter, with tolerable ſucceſs does indeed require a degree both of abilities and diſcretion, which can by no means be expected from the greater part of thoſe who officiate; and it is obvious, how often reaſonable men muſt in that caſe be diſguſted with what is injudicious and improper.

* 'It is ſaid to be unreaſonable, that 'Chriſtian Miniſters ſhould be confined 'to a ſtated Form in their Prayers more 'than in their Sermons;' as if there were not a ſtriking difference. The Prayers pronounced by the Miniſter, and addreſſed to God, ought to be ſuch, as all

* See Proteſtant Diſſenter's Catechiſm, Part ii. Queſt. 42.

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the Congregation can join in and make their own; whereas Sermons are addreſſed to the Congregation, who are not to make them their own, but to hear and to judge of them. For thoſe, who are always inſiſting on their Right of Private Judgement, will I preſume exerciſe it upon the Sermons of their Miniſter, and not take all that he teaches them implicitly and upon truſt. The abſurdity, if there be any, in a Sermon is only the Miniſter's; in Prayers, the Congregation muſt adopt it, or muſt not pray. Not to mention, that the ſubjects of Moral and Religious Inſtruction admit of prodigious variety; whereas thoſe of Prayer are comparatively few in number, and therefore eaſily reducible to ſtated Forms.

It can hardly ever happen, that in any thing, which has been a matter of diſpute, one ſide can be exempt from all inconveniencies,

veniencies, and its oppoſite attended with no advantages. But not to trouble You, my Lord, with taking the unneceſſary pains of proving, that in Public Worſhip the advantages attending ſtated Forms vaſtly preponderate, I will beg leave to offer ſome reflections on the Forms of our own Church.

They are certainly on the whole good: I do not mean good with reſpect to the particular religious opinions they expreſs, for that is a conſideration of quite another kind, but with reſpect to their Manner and Language; they are inſtruments well adapted to promote true and rational piety. God is addreſſed in them with ſimplicity, yet with dignity; a juſt ſenſe of his tranſcendent attributes, and of our dependence on him, pervades the whole of them; they compriſe all the various modes of addreſſing him, for the ſupply

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of our wants, for pardon of our ſins, for benefits received, which our relation to him as Men and as Chriſtians renders proper and neceſſary; the diſtribution and expreſſion of theſe different modes is well calculated to awaken and to keep up our attention; there is warmth enough in them for the rational worſhipper, though not perhaps for the enthuſiaſt; and the ceremonies, with which our forms are accompanied, are few, decent, and intelligible. The Language alſo, in which they are compoſed, is for the moſt part peculiarly proper for the purpoſe; the Liturgy and Engliſh Bible have given, as a ſort of ſtandard, a degree of permanency to our whole language; they have in ſome meaſure fixed our taſte with reſpect to that, which is proper for the public offices of Religion; and the caſt of antiquity, with which they are tinctured,

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only ſerves to make them more ſimple and venerable.

But allowing our Public Forms all this merit, for one party to ſuppoſe them perfect, and for the other to reprobate them for not being ſo, is equally unreaſonable. Perfect they could not be; and if that had been poſſible, they could not have appeared ſo to different men of different opinions. They would be unlike all other human performances, if they were not capable of improvement in a long courſe of time, from ſubſequent knowledge, from continued experience, from repeated obſervation, and let me add, from the cenſures of thoſe who diſſent from us. A Reviſion of our Forms by Authority would, my Lord, as I conceive, do honour to our Church; it would give it the true merit of being really more

more perfect, at the expence only of parting with an imaginary notion of perfection.

An impropriety has in ſome inſtances ariſen from a change in the manner and time of performing the public ſervices of the Church. Some of thoſe, which were originally intended for different times, are now uſed together; for this reaſon they appear not well united; there are unneceſſary repetitions now in them, which were not ſo in their ſeparate ſtate; and the whole is rendered too long and leſs uniform.

The Scripture, though we allow it all to be of divine authority, yet is not in all its parts equally fit for public and popular uſe. The Compilers of our Liturgy appear to have been of this mind; and have accordingly wholly omitted

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ſeveral parts of it in the courſe of Leſſons. It would be perhaps better, if ſtill more were omitted, and replaced by other parts more uſeful and edifying. Some of the Apocrypha in particular, to which indeed we attribute no divine authority, has ſo much the air of legend and fable, that it by no means deſerves a place in the ſervice of our Church.

Thoſe parts alſo of Scripture, which occur moſt frequently in our public worſhip, and are ſelected for the time, when our churches are fulleſt, ſhould be the moſt edifying, ſhould be the leaſt liable to be miſconſtrued, and miſapplied by the ignorant, either in their faith or practice. In this view, I cannot help thinking, that even ſome of the Pſalms are not proper for a part of the ſervice, which occurs ſo frequently. I ſhould ſuppoſe too, that Leſſons might be ſelected

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for Sundays and Holidays more improving than the preſent, more applicable to the belief and conduct of a Chriſtian.

If ever ſuch a Reviſion ſhould take place, many alterations, few perhaps conſiderable, throughout the whole of our Liturgy would offer themſelves, which would undoubtedly render it more perfect; more approved by the judicious Members of our own Church, and leſs exceptionable to thoſe, who are diſpoſed to cenſure it.

The Public Inſtruction of the Church of England is ſuch as muſt always do her honour. It is on the whole able and edifying; the truths and doctrines of Chriſtianity are explained with knowledge and good ſenſe; the duties of it are inculcated with earneſtneſs. Controverſial ſubjects, uſeleſs and indeed unintelligible to moſt

congregations, are wiſely almoſt baniſhed from our pulpits; the diſcourſes delivered from which tend to make the hearers good Chriſtians in general, rather than zealous members of a particular Church, and partizans of a particular ſect of Chriſtianity.

I have not, I believe, ſaid too much of our Public Inſtruction in general; but the beſt part of it is certainly excellent in its kind: the firſt-rate Sermons of the Engliſh Clergy, are probably the ableſt performances of the ſort, that ever were compoſed or delivered. And notwithſtanding the general complaint, perhaps too well founded, of the infidelity of the age, of our want of all attention to religious ſubjects, there appears to be a conſtant demand for ſuch diſcourſes, as are excellent in their kind, and come from Authors of known and eſtabliſhed reputation.

tation. In this commendation of the Sermons of the eſtabliſhed Clergy I would join the Diſſenters with them, as I have before done on the ſubject of Clerical Learning, with which indeed the compoſition of Sermons is connected. They have contributed their part to the excellent collection of Engliſh Sermons, of which the public is poſſeſſed. Theirs and ours are for the moſt part ſo much the ſame, that they may be uſed indifferently by both of us; a circumſtance which I think both ſhould obſerve with pleaſure; for I do not wiſh to magnify the differences between us: we agree in ſo many things which are good and important, that I would never by choice dwell on many of the trifling particulars in which we differ.

The Sermons of our Clergy are uſually precompoſed and delivered from writing; this mode and the other of ſpeaking an

unwritten diſcourſe have, as it generally happens in other caſes, their reſpective advantages and diſadvantages. The firſt method will produce diſcourſes more correct in all particulars, in reaſoning, language, and method; the latter will have, when tolerably performed, more life and feeling. But when congregations, eſpecially thoſe of the better ſort, have been long uſed to the accuracy and order of diſcourſes written and prepared in private, they will not eaſily be ſatisfied with liſtening to thoſe of an extempore Preacher; who, except he be a man of very eminent and ſuperior abilities, muſt neceſſarily produce what is far ſhort of that, which is the fruit of meditation and ſtudy. For the ſubjects of Religious Inſtruction cannot be treated before an audience with the ſame eaſe with thoſe, which are uſually diſcuſſed in other public Aſſemblies. They are many of them of a more nice

and difficult nature; and however intereſting in a philoſophical and religious light the truths and duties of Chriſtianity may be thought, yet in common life they will not engage men in the ſame degree with the popular buſineſs of the preſent moment, uſually diſcuſſed in ſuch aſſemblies. The intereſt men take in buſineſs of this kind ſupports both the ſpirit of the Speaker, and the attention of the Hearers, and in treating it we are by cuſtom taught to expect leſs form and accuracy.

That the Clergy ſhould diſcharge their duties with knowledge and ability, as well as be regular and punctual in them, is of the greateſt importance; but theſe duties, however diſcharged, will by no means have their full effect, except they be accompanied by their own Example; except their Life and Manners be ſuch,

as to recommend the Precepts they deliver, to evince their ſincerity in the belief of thoſe Truths which they profeſs to eſtabliſh.

It is certain, they have peculiar motives for virtuous and exemplary conduct. The ſtudies, the buſineſs of their profeſſion naturally direct their mind to ſerious objects; it can hardly be ſuppoſed that the man, who is continually employed in telling others their duty, in offering to God their addreſſes, which conſiſt of petitions for the relief of our wants, and for the forgiveneſs of our ſins, of promiſes of obedience, of expreſſions of gratitude for his bleſſings, ſhould do all this ſo mechanically and by rote, as not to make the application to himſelf, and to let it operate on his own conduct. He muſt reflect, if he reflects at all, that although obedience to the commandments

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of God be a univerſal obligation on all mankind, yet it comes with peculiar force on him, whoſe office it is to prevail on others by every motive to obey him; that the Teacher, who contradicts by his own life the inſtruction he delivers, and thus defeats the effect of it, muſt be inexcuſable. And if a man cannot be influenced by better motives, without at leaſt a decency of character there can be no tolerable proſpect of ſucceſs in the Clerical Profeſſion; for however corrupt the world about us may be, and indulgent to vice, yet a vicious Clergyman is a character ſo very unbecoming in the ſight of all people, that it ſeldom meets with indulgence, and certainly does not deſerve it. So that without giving the Clergy credit for better natural diſpoſitions than their neighbours, it may reaſonably be expected, that their conduct ſhould be better, even upon principle; at leaſt, with

reſpect to the world, more decent and circumſpect.

But notwithſtanding all theſe particular motives, as they are made of the ſame materials with men of other profeſſions, it cannot be ſuppoſed, that in every caſe theſe motives will have their due influence. To expect, that ten thouſand men will always act well, becauſe they are Clergymen, is to expect, what the condition of human nature will not admit. That their conduct ſhould be in general good, that their lives ſhould be innocent, that the decorum of their character ſhould be preſerved, is a reaſonable expectation. It may be expected, that the want of this decorum ſhould not be common; and that there ſhould be very few inſtances of groſs and public miſbehaviour. When ſuch inſtances happen, and happen rarely, to infer any thing from them to the diſ-

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credit of the profeſſion itſelf, is not conſidering the nature of Man, the infirmities and faults to which he is liable, whatever may be the external ſituation in which he is placed.

If this be a reaſonable meaſure for eſtimating the conduct of a Body of Clergy; I ſhould flatter myſelf, that thoſe of our own Church would at leaſt come up to it; that the conduct of the bulk of them would be thought becoming their profeſſion, and the inſtances of the contrary in any groſs degree appear comparatively very rare. For in theſe caſes the numbers, of which a Body of men conſiſts, muſt always be taken into the account; and when a particular inſtance is conſidered, the proportion which it bears to the whole muſt be conſidered alſo. In this reſpect ſmaller ſects have the advantage of the predominant religion of a country;

country; their Miniſters are few in number, and the very circumſtance of their diſſenting from the majority keeps them on their good behaviour.

Decorum in the Clerical Profeſſion, and indeed in moſt others, does not depend on what is merely moral or immoral in the conduct of men, but has reference to preſent Manners. Prevailing habits and modes of thinking render things, in themſelves indifferent, proper or improper, and give them a relative importance. Every prudent man muſt to a certain degree comply with theſe, if he would fill any ſtation of life with credit to himſelf, or uſefulneſs to others. The character of a Clergyman from the nature of it ought certainly to be marked with ſomewhat more ſerioufneſs, ſomewhat more regard to appearance even in innocent things, (for of immoralities I am not ſpeaking)

ſpeaking) than that of the generality of the world. But this decorum muſt be the decorum of the preſent age and of preſent manners; what our anceſtors thought ſo would with us be ſtiffneſs and auſterity, and would ſit as awkwardly on us as their dreſs.

I am ſenſible, this is not the extreme, into which our Clergy are in danger of falling, the general propenſity of the times running ſo ſtrongly another way: diſſipation and levity of character are the things in theſe days to be avoided. Yet without incurring the imputation of theſe, the manners of the Clergy may ſurely be ſuch, it is I think deſireable, that they ſhould be ſuch, as to fit them for the ſociety of the world, not to exclude them from the better part of it; an eaſe of character, added to their higher qualifications of virtue and good

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ſenſe, is moſt likely to recommend the Religion, of which they are Miniſters *.

As it is to be wiſhed, that the inſtruction and example of the Clergy ſhould influence all ranks of men, the higheſt as well as the loweſt; it is ſurely expedient, that they ſhould not be viewed in a diſagreeable or contemptible light by the former; and this will not diſqualify them

* I cannot help mentioning, what I heard from a very intelligent Heſſian Officer, of good character, who was in England with the troops of that country in the laſt war. He had been introduced to a Clergyman of eminence, one of the moſt chearful, polite, and amiable men in the world; he expreſſed the utmoſt ſurpriſe to me at finding him ſo agreeable a man; 'for, added he, as to the Clergy of our country, 'they are quite a different ſort of people; we do not 'like them at all.' The manners of the German Clergy rendered them in general, I preſume, unacceptable to men of the world, and unfit for their ſociety.

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from being regarded properly by the latter, who are perhaps the firſt to deſpiſe thoſe of a better ſtation, whom they ſee approach too nearly to themſelves.

An Engliſh Clergyman of Knowledge in his profeſſion, punctual in the Duties of it, and unblemiſhed in his Character, if to theſe qualifications he joins thoſe accompliſhments of general Learning, and that agreeableneſs of Manners, of which many of our Clergy are poſſeſſed, bids perhaps as fair, my Lord, to command proper reſpect, and to acquire uſeful influence with all ranks of people, as any Chriſtian Miniſter in any country, where Chriſtianity is profeſſed.

LETTER VIII.

Concluſion.

I HAVE thus, my Lord, ventured to offer You my thoughts, as they occurred to me, with much freedom, on the Preſent State of our Church-Eſtabliſhment. It muſt be left to your Lordſhip's judgement, and to that of the Public, if theſe Letters ſhould deſerve the attention of the Public, to determine, how far the repreſentation I have given of the different parts of the ſubject be juſt; I can only ſay, that I have repreſented them in the light, in which they appear to me.

It is a ſubject, my Lord, which if purſued more at large would afford room for

much diſcuſſion, for many different opinions; in which continual panegyric is not to be expected, much leſs continual cenſure to be apprehended; for if we ſhould ſuſpect with reaſon the ſincerity of the one, we ſhould reprobate with ſtill more reaſon the injuſtice and malevolence of the other. I muſt repeat what I have ſaid already more than once, that in eſtimating the merit of Human Inſtitutions, and of Numerous Bodies of Men, we ſhould not raiſe our expectations above the ſtandard of Humanity. The characters of all Societies, formed for the civil or religious purpoſes of mankind, will be mixed, like thoſe of the Individuals of which they are compoſed; to expect Perfection in them implies an ignorance of our nature; we muſt take thoſe for good, which are good on the whole; and be ſatisfied, if we mean to be ſatisfied in this world, with perſons and things,

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where the defects are comparatively few, and the good conſiderably predominant.

It is in this view, my Lord, and with ſuch expectations only, that I have purſued theſe reflections. How far the Church-Eſtabliſhment, as it now ſubſiſts in this country, is an Inſtitution fit for the purpoſes it was meant to anſwer, both with reſpect to Religion and Society; how far the Clergy of England are worthy Miniſters of the Religion of Chriſt, and uſeful Members of our Civil Community, were the objects of my inquiry. Whether I have eſtimated the merits both of the Eſtabliſhment and its Clergy by their proper meaſure, whether the concluſions I have drawn are reaſonable or not, others will determine; I do not pretend to preſcribe to them the judgement they ſhall form; but if what I have ſaid ſhall in any degree approve itſelf to your Lordſhip

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in particular, and to any other candid, liberal, and intelligent readers, in whoſe way theſe letters may fall; if it ſhall ſuggeſt to them any topics, which may aſſiſt them in forming their own judgement, the purpoſe of this addreſs will be fully anſwered.

I am not more deſirous, that ſuch readers ſhould be ſatisfied with thoſe parts of our Church-Eſtabliſhment, which appear to me good and unexceptionable, than I am, that their attention ſhould be directed to thoſe parts, which are capable of improvement, and which call for it. Though it muſt be expected, that all Human Inſtitutions will have their defects; this is no reaſon, why endeavours ſhould not be uſed to leſſen and correct them; to render their proportion to what is good as ſmall as poſſible. Length of

time and change of circumſtances produce of themſelves unforeſeen inconveniences in things, which were planned at firſt with the greateſt wiſdom; they make what was originally well adapted to the purpoſes intended, unfit and inapplicable; they produce improvements in knowledge, which in juſtice to ourſelves we ſhould adopt; ſo that Human Inſtitutions of every kind will grow, from theſe cauſes only, leſs perfect and leſs uſeful, except they are from time to time refitted and readjuſted.

This muſt be the caſe of every National Church, which has long ſubſiſted; and it ſeems reaſonable to uſe the ſame conduct with reſpect to that, as all wiſe nations do in other parts of legiſlation; to make ſuch alterations and amendments in Eccleſiaſtical regulations, as any improvements

provements in religious knowledge, or change of circumſtances may require. That this ſhould be done not wantonly or unneceſſarily, will readily be admitted; but we ſurely ſeem too tender, too much afraid of moving a ſtone of our Church, as if on being touched, though ever ſo gently, the whole fabric would fall to pieces: I truſt there is in it more ſtrength and ſolidity. There might be reaſon for this exceſſive caution, if the Church were now, as it once was, an inſtrument of party, and the very name of it ſufficient to ſet half the nation in a flame; but now, my Lord, bad conſequences are very little to be apprehended on account of any wiſe and uſeful alterations, which ſhould be recommended to the Legiſlature by the Governors of our Church; they would be well received by the moderation and good ſenſe of the better part of the nation, to the inattention and indif-

ference of moſt others they would be uninteresting. Such improvements may be made, without affecting the great principles, on which our Eſtabliſhment is founded, or changing its eſſential parts; by being ſo improved its virtues would be more acknowledged, its utility more apparent.

The Clergy, who act under it, have every motive to render themſelves, what by their character and ſituation they are qualified to be, worthy Miniſters of the Religion of Chriſt, and uſeful Members of our Civil Community. Their Predeceſſors, a generation or two backward, could not perhaps as a Body of men be eſteemed favourable to that ſyſtem of Liberty, which took place at the Revolution; they could not immediately diveſt themſelves of old prejudices concerning Government. But theſe ſubſiſt

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no longer; Civil Liberty perhaps owes more to one Great * Man of the Clerical Profeſſion, than to any other ſingle Writer of any denomination. The principles, on which it is founded, are diffuſed at large throughout the Clergy, and as generally adopted by them, as by any other Claſs of men. If they ſhould be charged by the over-zealous Friends of Liberty with not carrying their notions of it far enough, further than they are authoriſed by the legal principles of our Government, to that charge I believe they would plead guilty in its utmoſt extent; for they are bound by every tie of duty and intereſt to preſerve and ſupport, as far as lies in them, our Preſent Civil Conſtitution.

I reflect on this and on our Eccleſiaſtical Eſtabliſhment with nearly the ſame

* Hoadly.

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ſentiments. Notwithſtanding the many defects and corruptions in the former, which candid men will allow, and the uncandid will exaggerate; yet when I ſee, that in this country we are more free, more ſecure in our perſons and property, than the inhabitants of any country have been, whoſe hiſtory is tranſmitted to us; that juſtice is adminiſtered in our Courts of Law with a purity, of which there is no example; that this Conſtitution has in fact produced for near a century, more public and private happineſs, than any government which has ever yet ſubſiſted; I muſt conclude, that it is on the whole excellent, however improveable in ſome of its parts; that it deſerves the warmeſt affection and moſt faithful ſupport of all its members. So likewiſe, however injuriouſly our Whole Church-Eſtabliſhment may be ſometimes treated by paſſionate men; though reaſonable and moderate men may think, that in ſome of its Parts it wants

correction

correction and is capable of amendment; yet, when I conſider its Spirit of Toleration towards other ſects of Chriſtians, the Freedom with which Religious Inquiry is purſued under it, the Learning and Abilities of its Clergy, their Literary Productions in the Support of Chriſtianity and for Inſtruction in it, with the general Decorum and Propriety of their Manners, I cannot help concluding, that the Preſent Church of England on the whole deſerves the eſteem and veneration of our own age, and that it will hereafter be conſidered by Poſterity as a worthy and illuſtrious branch of Chriſt's Univerſal Church.

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